THE SWADESHI MOVEMENT IN BENGAL

1903-1908

By

Sumit Sarkar

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To

my parents

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Since this book went to press, Shri Chinmohan Sehanavis's *Rus Biplab o Prabasi Bharatiya Biplabi* (Calcutta, 1973) has thrown much new light on the European socialist contacts of Hemchandra Kanungo and other Indian revolutionaries abroad. It will remain my lasting regret that the publication of Dr Amiya Bagchi's *Private Investment in India, 1900-1939* (Cambridge, 1972) came too late for me to use; reading this truly classic work before would have helped me greatly in my chapter on swadeshi enterprise.

To my father, I owe my first interest and training in history, and my debt to him needs no formal statement. My wife has shouldered the major part of the burden of proof-reading and

preparing the index, and to her belongs also the credit or otherwise of persuading a lazy author to turn a thesis into a book. Formal acknowledgements here can be no more than private words addressed to her in public.

The responsibility for errors of fact or argument remains mine alone.

15 October 1973 SUMIT SARKAR

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

RNP(B)	Report on the Native Papers in Bengal.
RNEP(B)	Report on the Native-owned English Newspapers in Bengal.
HFM(B)	Materials on the History of the Freedom Movement in Bengal (excerpts from Intelligence Branch Records preserved in the West Bengal State Archives).
RIFLC 1908	Report of the Indian Factory Labour Commission (1908).
Home Public Progs Home Political Progs	Unpublished Home Department Proceedings of the Government of India, preserved in the National Archives of India.

To save space, references to the place of publication of books have been omitted in the footnotes; the full references will be found in the bibliography at the end.

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INTRODUCTION

The present work attempts a detailed study of a five-year period in Bengal's history which despite its brief duration has come to occupy a very notable place in the historiography of nationalism and in the collective memory of our people. Apart from the abundant literature of biographies and memoirs,[1] individual aspects of this antipartition or swadeshi movement already have their historians,[2] the main landmarks of political history have been adequately covered in numerous works on Indian nationalism,[3] and growing access to the private papers of viceroys and officials have produced recently a spate of monographs on government policies in general[4]

[1] Thus we have the autobiographical writings of Surendranath Banerji, Bepinchandra Pal, Krishnakumar Mitra, Aurobindo Ghosh, Barindrakumar Ghosh, Hemchandra Kanungo, Bhupendranath Dutta and Upendranath Banerji; a life of Motilal Ghosh, and no less than four biographies of Aswinikumar Dutta.

[2] Cf. particularly the numerous books of Haridas and Uma Mukherji listed in the bibliography.

[3] Cf. for instance Haridas and Uma Mukherji, *India's Fight for Freedom* (1958); R. C. Majumdar, *History of the Freedom Movement in India*, Volume II (1962); R. C. Majumdar (ed), *British Paramountcy and the Indian Renaissance*, Part II (1965); B. B. Majumdar, *Militant Nationalism in India* (1966); Daniel Argov, *Moderates and Extremists in the Indian Nationalist Movement 1883-1920* (1967); and A. Tripathi, *The Extremist Challenge* (1967).

[4] Extracts from the private papers of top officials have been printed in Morley's *Recollections* (1917), in Lady Minto's counterblast of *India, Minto and Morley 1905-1910* (1934), and more recently in Martin Gilbert's *Servant of India* (1966). Three major works dealing with official policies during 1905-10 have been published of late—M. N. Das, *India under Morley and Minto* (1964); S. R. Wasti, *Lord Minto and the Indian Nationalist Movement 1905-1910* (1964); and S. A. Wolpert, *Morley and India 1906-1910* (1967). Cf. also S. Gopal, *British Policy in India 1858-1905* (1965), Chapter V, and A. Tripathi, *op. cit.*, Chapter VI.

and the evolution of the partition plan in particular.[5] I have therefore avoided the tedium of a purely chronological narration,[6] and felt free to follow my personal interests in focusing on the streets of Calcutta or the villages of Barisal rather than the somewhat rarefied heights of Darjeeling, Simla or the India Office. The reader might still ask why a new book was needed at all on such a well-worn subject, and what relevance it can have for us today. An explanation may help to clarify also the precise themes chosen by the author, their arrangement, and maybe the preferences implied therein.

Historians in our country still occasionally claim for themselves the impartiality of judges[7] (itself, one would feel, hardly an unquestionable absolute); that historical reconstruction at both popular and academic levels is rather a dialogue between present and past generations, inevitably time-bound and selective, is amply borne out by the existing literature on the swadeshi movement. What has fascinated most the imagination of educated bhadralok Bengal and her historians is undoubtedly the saga of individual terrorism beginning with Kshudiram and the Maniktala conspiracy——socalled militant

[5] Recent articles on the development of the partition plan include: (i) J. H. Broomfield, "The Partition of Bengal"—*Proceedings of the Indian History Congress, 1960.* (ii) Z. H. Zaidi, "The Political Motive in the Partition of Bengal"—*Journal of the Pakistan Historical Society,* Volume XII, Part II (April 1964). (iii) J. R. McLane, "The Decision to Partition Bengal in 1905"—*The Indian Economic and Social History Review,* Volume II, No. 3 (July 1965). (iv) Kalpana Bishui, "The Origin and Evolution of the Scheme for the First Partition of Bengal"—*Quarterly Review of Historical Studies,* Volume V (1965-66), No. 2. Mrs Bishui's essay is the best that I have read so far on the subject. Brief accounts are given also in S. Gopal, *op. cit.,* pp. 268-75, and A. Tripathi, *op. cit.,* Chapter III.

[6] A chronological table listing the principal landmarks has been included at the end of the book.

[7] Cf. for instance R. C. Majumdar's formulation—"The purpose of the historian is the ascertainment of the Truth. His only duty is to determine guilt or innocence in the fashion of a judge in a law court"—"Bharat-itihasher Nutan Sanskaran", *Itihas,* Volume VI (Old Series) No. 2, Agrahayan-Magh 1362 (1955-56).

nationalism for example is evidently Dr R. C. Majumdar's first love, the heroic climax to which all earlier endeavours inevitably lead. The upsurge of 1905-7 is also remembered, of course, but often in a romanticised version which exaggerates it into a 'Great Bengali Revolution',[8] while at the same time strangely neglects aspects like labour unrest or quiet constructive work in villages, and slurs over uncomfortable things like peasant passivity and the probable role of Hindu revivalist ideology in sharpening communal tensions. Such attitudes not unoften betray traces of Bengali and Hindu chauvinism. They also leave unanswered and even unasked the crucial question as to why 1905 was succeeded by 1908, why techniques of open mass struggle (meetings and demonstrations, boycott of foreign goods and schools, 'passive resistance' anticipating much of Gandhism, labour unions and strikes) had to give place so quickly to methods of individual terror. The conventional explanation in terms of police repression alone, I feel, is not really sufficient; what we need is a study in depth of the tensions within the swadeshi movement as it evolved out of and wrestled with the socio-economic structure, political challenges and cultural and religious traditions of Bengal.

I have chosen, then, as my central theme the shifts within nationalism in political objectives, methods and social ideals. The antipartition movement, conducted at first on quite conventional lines by established politicians worried mainly over an alleged threat to certain elite privileges, rapidly broadened after 1905 into an awareness of irreconcilable conflict between British and Indian interests which only swaraj could resolve. 'Prayers and petitions' consequently gave place to the first major efforts of the nationalist bhadralok intelligentsia to attain identity with the masses and mobilise them around a programme of 'passive resistance'. But swaraj was never translated into concrete bread-and-butter terms for the masses, or integrated with any real peasant programme; nor

[8] A phrase coined by Benoykumar Sarkar, and frequently reiterated in the books of Haridas and Uma Mukherji.

could the swadeshi leaders despite some sincere efforts develop like Gandhi an idiom or style of political activity which could effectively bridge the elite-mass gap. By 1908, therefore, we are faced by the two poles of renewed 'mendicancy' and a cult of individual violence, opposites which still share something in common, twin manifestations of a failure to develop a genuine mass political movement. One is reminded of the history of Russian Narodnism—"However strange it may appear at first sight...we are inevitably led to conclude that the pistol-shot becomes an exact substitute for Serno-Solovevich's appeal to the tsar... It was both an act of extreme lack of confidence in the state and a confession that the revolutionaries themselves were too immature to replace it with an organisation of their own."[9] Lenin's penetrating remarks on the affinity between economism and terrorism seem also not irrelevant here.[10]

My choice of theme has dictated the chronological limits of 1903 and 1908, for the open and at least potentially mass movement sparked off by the announcement of the first draft of the partition plan in December 1903 was clearly giving place to something very different after the Maniktala arrests (May 1908), the deportation of nine leaders (December 1908), and the ban on the principal samitis (January 1909).

As for the arrangement of my material, after a brief discussion of the partition plan and a sketch of conditions in Bengal on the eve of the swadeshi upsurge (Chapter I), I have passed on to the heart of my subject—an analysis of the 'trends' within the movement (Chapter II). Here, in place of the conventional moderate-extremist dichotomy which I think is oversimplified, I have explored the possibilities of a fourfold classification in terms of ideals and techniques. The 'model' of the swadeshi age which I have tried to construct in this chapter includes three other dimensions—the ideological debates between 'modernism' and 'revivialism' which

[9] Franco Venturi, *Roots of Revolution* (London, 1960), p. 335.
[10] V. I. Lenin, *What Is To Be Done?* (1902)—*Collected Works*, Volume V (Moscow, 1964), pp. 417-21.

cut across the political trends, the impact of British policies, and the socio-economic structure of Bengal which ultimately set limits on the freedom of all actors on the political stage. The relevance of this model is tested in three succeeding chapters surveying swadeshi and boycott, national education, and—little-known but highly-interesting and important—labour unrest. Chapters VI and VII attempt a different kind of cross-section of the movement, exploring the communication techniques and organisational forms adopted in the efforts to break through to the masses. The ultimate failure here is obviously closely bound up with the Hindu-Muslim problem, and isolation from the masses—not police repression alone—led to a growing emphasis on revolutionary terrorism; these constitute the themes of Chapters VIII and IX. I should add that while the focus throughout remains on the years from 1903 to 1908, attempts have been made wherever possible to link up the individual facets of the movement with what had preceded and what was to follow it in the life of Bengal, thus reducing, I hope, the myopia which tends to afflict all research workers. A serious limitation, however—for which I can only plead my own ignorance plus reasons of space and time—is the restriction of the entire discussion to Bengal alone, despite the evident interconnections with other parts of our country, particularly Tilak's Maharashtra and Lajpat Rai's Punjab.

Historical parallels are dangerous and seldom really fruitful, and yet to a present-day resident of Calcutta there is surely something almost uncannily familiar about the 1905 upsurge—which in one of its aspects was a movement of educated and idealist youth, reacting against the compromises indulged in by established political groups, seeking in vain an objective correlative to their own fervour among the masses, and turning to the attractive but ultimately frustrating short-cut of individual terrorism, of heroic selfsacrifice by the few in the hope of rousing the many. If the resemblance is not purely a coincidence, the link must be sought in the social contours of the elite-mass relationship in the Bengal of 1905 and of today. My concluding chapter, apart from

offering a brief assessment of the swadeshi age and its cultural achievements, attempts a discussion of the social content and nature of the movement as a whole. In so far as it has gone beyond simple enumeration of patriotic deeds, research on Indian nationalism has tended to follow one of two alternative stereotypes, relating it either to the upthrust of a 'bourgeois' or 'middle' class, or to the status-aspirations of various 'elite' groups—and among the latter the Bengali bhadralok is currently enjoying considerable fame in Western academic circles.[11] The bhadralok concept has its advantages in the swadeshi context—the politically-active groups in 1905 Bengal after all hardly constituted a genuine industrial or commercial bourgeoisie—and as such I have used it fairly frequently. But I am not at all in agreement with some of the methodological assumptions made by present-day theorists of the bhadralok, most notably with their pseudo-Namierite attempts to reduce nationalism to individual material interests virtually divorced from ideological dimensions—and this I have tried to make clear in my last chapter.

My interest in the popular movement naturally led me to concentrate first of all on the nonofficial sources. Of these, contemporary newspapers are perhaps the most massive, but unfortunately these are not at all well-preserved in our country: only a few stray copies apparently surviving, for instance, of even famous vernacular journals like the *Sanjibani*, the *Yugantar*, or the *Sandhya*. English-language dailies have been more fortunate, and I have made considerable use of three of them in particular—the *Bengalee*, the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* and the *Bande Mataram*, representing broadly speaking the right, the centre, and the left in the national movement of those days. The periodical press—and in particular the Bengali monthlies—have proved to be a rich mine of information as regards the deeper ideological conflicts of the age. Far too many of the contemporary pamphlets have been lost, and the Bengal Library Catalogue

[11] Most notably in the recent publications of Anil Seal and J. H. Broomfield.

makes tantalising reading today[12]—but I have been able to trace and make use of about sixty such tracts dealing with various aspects of the swadeshi movement. The literature of that age, graced as it was by the presence of a veritable galaxy of distinguished Bengali writers—including the very greatest of them all—was deeply influenced, as is well known, by the political upsurge; and I have tried to utilise to the best of my ability the peculiarly rich and fascinating source constituted by the swadeshi songs, plays and 'jatras', novels. and other forms of artistic expression. The later literature of biographies and memoirs has its pitfalls, and I have avoided overmuch dependence on such secondary sources—except to some extent in the chapter on revolutionary terrorism where other types of material are relatively scanty.

Most exciting of all have been the collections of private papers which I was fortunate enough to have been able to unearth. The richest of these are the very well-preserved papers of Aswinicoomar Banerji, barrister, swadeshi leader and pioneer labour organiser; they include an autobiographical fragment, voluminous correspondence with many prominent politicians of the swadeshi age (no less than forty-six letters, for instance, from Surendranath Banerji alone), a number of fascinating trade-union documents, and press-clippings from journals many of which have become extremely rare today. I have also utilised the unpublished diaries of Hemendraprasad Ghosh, Gyanchandra Banerji, Satyakinkar Sahana, and Sukumar Mitra (the son of Krishnakumar)—as well as the relevant microfilms of Curzon, Minto and Morley papers preserved at the National Archives.

Among official records, by far the most valuable have been the Home Public and Home Political Proceedings of the

[12] By the terms of the Press and Registration of Books Act of 1867, the Bengal Library was supplied with a copy of all books published in the province, and quarterly lists of new acquisitions were printed as supplements to the *Calcutta Gazette*. The whole stock of such publications was later transferred to the Imperial (now the National) Library --but it seems that in the 1920s a committee of 'experts' eliminated many 'unnecessary' books and pamphlets for reasons of space.

government of India—the files of which include fortnightly reports and police abstracts; detailed surveys of the boycott, national education, and 'samiti' movements; much valuable information about labour unrest and communal riots; and the dossiers of many public figures. I was not permitted access to the intelligence branch records of Lord Sinha Road in Calcutta, but judging from the copious extracts from these files which are available at the West Bengal State Archives,[13] much of the material there found its way eventually into the Home Proceedings preserved at New Delhi. The State Archives contain also the reports on the native papers, considerable use of which not entirely reliable source has been made unavoidable by the poor preservation of so many of the actual vernacular newspapers. Finally, mention should be made of official publications—parliamentary papers, administrative reports and gazetteers, trade returns, and two invaluable surveys made in 1908 by J. G. Cumming and G. N. Gupta of indigenous industrial enterprise in Bengal and in the new province.

[13] The extracts were made by a State Committee on the History of the Freedom Movement in Bengal set up in the early 1950s. The committee and the project, like so many good things, seem to have gone the way of all flesh.

Chapter One

PARTITION AND BENGAL

I. The Development of the Partition Plan

The main facts regarding the evolution of the partition scheme are well-known and may be summarised briefly. After the Orissa famine of 1866, Sir Stafford Northcote suggested a reduction in the size of the vast presidency of Bengal (which then included, apart from Bengal proper, the whole of Bihar, Orissa and Assam) on grounds of administrative efficiency.[1] In 1874, Assam was separated and made into a chief-commissioner's province; Sylhet, a predominantly Bengali-speaking area, was transferred along with it despite some local opposition. In 1892, in connection with a proposal for the transfer of the South Lushai Hills from Bengal to Assam, some officials in the foreign department suggested that the whole of the Chittagong division (comprising the districts of Chittagong, Chittagong Hills Tracts, Noakhali and Tippera) should also be transferred. The latter idea was discussed in detail during 1896-97, in course of which William Ward, the chief commissioner of Assam, for the first time put forward the idea that the Dacca and Mymensingh districts should go along with Chittagong division into Assam, thus making of that province a unit big enough for a separate administrative cadre. Sir Henry Cotton, Ward's successor, vehemently opposed the whole plan, and with Mackenzie, the lieutenant-governor of Bengal, also rather lukewarm, the

[1] H. H. Risley (Secretary to the Government of India, Home Department) to the Chief Secretary, Government of Bengal, No. 3678 of 3 December 1903, para 3. Parliamentary Papers (House of Commons) 1905, Volume 58, Cd 2658 (Reconstitution of the Provinces of Bengal and Assam).

India government decided on 29 April 1897 to transfer South Lushai Hills only for the time being.[2] In 1901, the question of Bengal's boundaries was revived, at first purely on the departmental level, in connection with Sir Andrew Fraser's (the then chief commissioner of the Central Provinces) suggestions for some readjustments along the Bengal-CP border so as to solve the problem of Sambalpur, an Oriya enclave in a Hindi-speaking province. The file on the subject reached the viceroy only fourteen months later, provoking Curzon into his famous outburst against 'departmentalism'—the 'Round-and-round' note of 24 May 1902.[3] The same note referred to "the approaching incorporation of Berar in British India", in connection with which Curzon had already "suggested in council that we should take up the question of readjustment of boundaries all around". In the discussion which followed, Fraser in his note of 28 March 1903 strongly urged the transfer of both Chittagong division and Dacca and Mymensingh,[4] and for the first time highlighted the political benefits of the scheme. His ideas were accepted by Curzon, and embodied in the viceroy's Minute on Territorial Redistribution in India (19 May/1 June 1903) which its author fondly hoped would "fix the administrative boundaries of India for a generation".[5] The minute, suitably edited for public consumption,[6] formed the basis of Risley's letter of

[2] Kalpana Bishui, *op. cit.* A summary of the earlier discussion was made in J. P. Hewett's note of 28 August 1902—Home Public Progs A, December 1903, n. 149-60.

[3] "For 14 months it never occurred to a single human being in the departments to mention the matter, or to suggest that it should be mentioned. Round and round, like the diurnal revolution of the earth, went the file, stately, solemn, sure and slow..." Home Public Progs A, December 1903, n. 149-60.

[4] "I trust that the proposal to transfer Dacca and Mymensingh to Assam has not been finally shelved"—Fraser's note of 26 March 1903 —*Ibid.* Mrs Bishui has rightly emphasised the crucial importance of this intervention by Fraser.

[5] Minute by His Excellency the Viceroy on Territorial Redistribution in India, Part I (19 May 1903), Part II (1 June 1903), *Ibid.*

[6] Curzon rejected Risley's first draft with the interesting comment "What I could safely say in the privacy of the council chamber is not neces-

3 December 1903 proposing the transfer of Chittagong division, Dacca and Mymensingh to Assam.

Now began a process of expansion, which soon transformed a scheme for transfer of certain districts into a full-scale partition of Bengal. In the last week of December 1903, Fraser suggested that Bakargunj and Faridpur should also be annexed to Assam, converting the latter into a full-scale lieutenant-governor's province.[7] Curzon in course of his East Bengal tour (February 1904) hinted rather vaguely that "a more ambitious" scheme "for a larger readjustment in the east of Bengal" was being considered.[8] While for the next year and a half the general public was permittd to hear little about the matter—so much so that the impression spread that the whole idea had been dropped—the officials went on merrily with the game of switching about other people's lands. The list of transferable districts steadily expanded—the Bengal government on 6 April 1904 added Rangpur, Bogra, Pabna;[9] five months later Simla even more generously annexed Rajshahi, Dinajpur, Malda, Jalpaiguri and Cooch-Behar state to the new province.[10] Curzon on his return from England sent off this final scheme in his despatch to the secretary of state of 2 February 1905.[11] The secretary of state gave his consent in the despatch of 9 June,[12] and on 19 July 1905 the government of India announced its decision to set up a new

sarily suitable for proclamation on the housetops." Note of 10 November 1903—*Ibid.*

[7] Government of Bengal to Government of India, No. 5063 J of 21 December 1903. The idea was endorsed in Risley's reply to this letter, No. 3808 of 23 December 1903, *Ibid*, n. 159-60.

[8] Curzon's speech at Dacca, 18 February 1904—reprinted in P. Mukherji, *All About Partition* (1905), p. 40.

[9] Government of Bengal to Government of India (Home), No. 2556 J of 6 April 1904, para 28. Home Public Progs A, February 1905, n. 157.

[10] Government of India (Home) to Government of Bengal, No. 1902 of 13 September 1904—Home Public Progs A, February 1905, n. 159.

[11] *Ibid*, n. 166.

[12] Home Public Progs A, October 1905, n. 163.

province of 'Eastern Bengal and Assam' comprising the Chittagong, Dacca and Rajshahi divisions, Hill Tippera, Malda and Assam.[13] The formal proclamation came on 1 September, and on 16 October 1905 Bengal was partitioned.

The Risley letter set the pattern for all later apologies for the partition by justifying the move on grounds of administrative convenience. Reorganisation was necessary, it argued, to reduce "the excessive burden" on the Bengal government and to enable at the same time an expansion of Assam which would "give to its officers a wider and more interesting field of work . . . [and] a maritime outlet in order to develop its industries in tea, oil and coal".[14] Nationalist opinion, on the other hand, has always been virtually unanimous in its conviction that all such administrative arguments were little more than smokescreens for a deep imperialist design of 'divide and rule'. The underlying political motive has been variously explained as encouragement of Muslim separatism (this of course is the most common interpretation of all), the creation of a rival centre of nationalist Hindu politics in East Bengal,[15] and a vaguer but very widespread anti-Bengali feeling in British official circles.[16]

Till at least 1903, there can be no doubt that administrative considerations were predominant in all discussions concerning the future map of Bengal. The undivided province had an

[13] Resolution of the Government of India in the Home Department, No. 2491 of 19 July 1905, Parliamentary Papers (House of Commons), 1905, Volume 58, Cd 2658, n. 2.

[14] No. 3678 of 3 December 1903, *op. cit.*, paras 1, 19.

[15] Thus J. R. McLane, *op. cit.*, after laying a great deal of emphasis on alleged administrative factors, admits that there was also a political undertone; but this secondary aim, he argues, was not communal disruption but a division of Bengali Hindu politicians.

[16] "The genesis of the partition of Bengal had nothing . . . to do with Curzon's determination to crush a seditious Congress. It had its origins in the anti-Bengali prejudice among the civilians, growing to monstrous proportions in the latter half of the nineteenth century. . ."—Tripathi, *op. cit.*, p. 86.

area of 189,000 square miles and a population (in 1901) of 78½ million, and suggestions for easing the burden on its lieutenant-governor were thus not unnatural. These inevitably took the form of territorial reduction, since Curzon was violently opposed to the alternative idea of a governor-in-council system on the model of Bombay and Madras.[17] But at this stage the Assam problem was really a more important factor; Mackenzie in 1896 and Risley in March 1903 both agreed that transfer of Chittagong division alone would hardly reduce to any appreciable extent the pressure on Bengal,[18] and Bourdillon even claimed in June 1903 that "we are proud of the burden and of the importance and magnitude of our province, and do not shrink from the labour".[19] The Assam situation, however, was "*impossible*", declared Ibbetson after a meeting with Fuller—as the provincial service depended entirely on men lent by Calcutta, the chief commissioner could not "censure an officer, or refuse him leave, or transfer him to a district which he dislikes, or refuse him an appointment which he wants without running the risk of an immediate demand to revert to Bengal".[20] Risley in his note on 31 March 1903 emphasised the commercial benefits of the scheme—the Assam-Bengal railway would be brought under one administration, and "Bengal is not greatly interested in

[17] "Bengal is far too big a charge for any individual man, while the experiment to which the public, wholly ignorant of the secrets of administration, is apparently inclined, namely the substitution for a lieutenant-governor here of a governor with a council as at Bombay and Madras, is one which I should myself be most reluctant to put forward... Government by one man is infinitely better than government by three men, if it can be so managed..."—Curzon to Brodrick, 28 January 1904—Curzon Collection, MSS Eur. F. 111/63 (Volume 8).

[18] Lieutenant-Governor Mackenzie's views were recalled by J. P. Hewett in his note of 28 August 1902. Risley gave his opinions in a note dated 31 March 1903, Home Public Progs A, December 1903, n. 149-60.

[19] Bourdillon (lieutenant-governor of Bengal before Fraser) to Curzon, 21 June 1903—Curzon Collection, MSS Eur, F. 111/207 (Volume 28).

[20] Denzil Ibbetson's note of 8 February 1904—Home Public Progs A, February 1905, n. 155.

enabling Chittagong to compete with Calcutta, and Assam is". An expansion of Assam, said Curzon, would also "tend to place the planting interest in its proper place", and this "would be an unmixed benefit".[21] In June 1903 and again in a letter to Fraser dated 8 April 1904,[22] the viceroy justified the progressive expansion of the partition scheme mainly on administrative grounds. Bengal would be relieved only by cutting off from it a goodly proportion of its territory, and so Dacca, Mymensingh, and perhaps other districts too must go the way of Chittagong.[23]

Yet it is difficult to accept McLane's thesis that the political motive remained no more than a subordinate one right down to 1905. Home Proceedings and private papers alike vividly reveal the importance of political factors in moulding the final contours of the partition plan and in ruling out alternatives which on administrative grounds alone would have been at least equally viable.

As early as 1896, at least one officer—W. B. Oldham, commissioner of Chittagong division—had realised the possible political benefits of a new province which could "unite the most important part of the Mohammedan population of Eastern India", thus reducing what he called the 'politically threatening' position of the 'Hindu minority' in undivided Bengal.[24] Oldham's minute attracted little or no attention at that time—but eight years later Risley was to describe his views as 'very instructive'.[25]

In the whole discussion on the redrawing of provincial

[21] Minute of 1 June 1903, para 48—Home Public Progs A, December 1903, n. 149-60.

[22] Curzon Collection, MSS Eur, F. 111/209 (Volume 30).

[23] Minute of 1 June 1903, para 49—*op. cit.* The minute ends with—of all things—a quotation from Wordsworth:

"Give all thou canst—high Heaven rejects the lore
Of nicely-calculated less or more."

[24] W. B. Oldham to Chief Secretary of the Government of Bengal, No. 722 G of 7 February 1896—Home Public Progs A, May 1897. n. 204-34 (cited in K. Bishui, *op. cit.*)

[25] H. H. Risley's note of 2 March 1904—Home Public Progs A, February 1905, n. 155.

boundaries, political considerations cropped up again and again. Fraser vehemently objected to Ibbetson's proposal for attaching Marathi-speaking Berar (recently acquired from the Nizam) to Bombay as a 'politically unwise' move which would add to the 'influence of the Poona Brahmans'.[26] Curzon upheld the objection—"The last thing that we want to do is to consolidate the Mahratta race. We hear quite enough of Sivaji as it is"[27]—and Berar went to the Central Provinces instead. Commenting on the viceroy's proposal for transferring the Ganjam area from Madras to Bengal, A. T. Arundel declared: "My chief objection to the principle of the proposal is political"—he felt that the union of all Oriyas under a common administration might prove dangerous in the future.[28] Curzon was fairly confident that the Oriyas were not "capable of being a thorn in the side of government like the Bengalis on one side and the Marathas on the other",[29] but the idea was eventually dropped in the face of strong opposition from Lord Ampthill, governor of Madras. Suggestions for giving relief to the Bengal administration by setting up an executive council or by separating Bihar and Orissa—made repeatedly by nationalists[30] and also by ex-officials like Henry Cotton,[31] C. C. Stevens,[32] and C. E. Buckland[33]— were brush-

[23] Fraser to Curzon, 15 December 1902—Curzon Collection, MSS Eur, F. 111/206 (Volume 27).

[27] Minute on Territorial Redistribution, Part I, 19 May 1903, para 9—Home Public Progs A, December 1903, n. 149-60.

[28] A. T. Arundel's note of 19 June 1903—*Ibid.*

[29] Curzon's note of 28 June 1903—*Ibid.*

[30] Both alternatives were suggested, for instance, in *An Open Letter to Curzon* (Dacca, 1904)—copy enclosed with Home Public Progs Deposit, April 1904, n. 39; and the East Bengal Memorial to the Secretary of State, July 1905—Prithwischandra Ray, *The Case Against the Break-up of Bengal* (1905), Appendix F.

[31] Speech as chairman at Town Hall meeting, 11 January 1905—*The Case Against the Break-up of Bengal*, Appendix B.

[32] Notes of C. C. Stevens, 24 February 1904, 6 April 1904—Home Public Progs A, February 1905, n. 157.

[33] Minute by C. E. Buckland, 29 February 1904—Enclosed with Government of Bengal Letter No. 2556 J of 6 April 1904: *Ibid.*

ed aside, once again mainly on political grounds. An executive council might be dangerous, warned Risley, as in the case of dissensions within it, "the Bengalis with their genius for intrigue would ... find their own advantage and indulge their ruling instinct in stirring up strife and paralysing the executive".[34] When the secretary of state's council at the last moment put forward the idea that relief could be given by setting up autonomous commissionerships for Chota Nagpur and Orissa on the Sind model[35]—a diluted version of Cotton's plan—the viceroy was furious. If his partition scheme was rejected at this eleventh hour, Curzon warned, "the prestige of the government of India will be seriously weakened". What was even more serious, the alternative suggested by the India Council "would tend to consolidate the Bengali element by detaching it from outside factors, and would produce the very effect that we desire to avoid. The best guarantee of the political advantage of our proposal is its dislike by the Congress Party".[36]

In a letter to Fraser dated 24 July 1905, Curzon remarked: "In face of the chief offender, you seem to have got off very lightly about partition! But had the whole correspondence been published, which the secretary of state actually proposed to do—I expect that you would have been crucified at my side."[37] The comment was eminently just, and in fact Fraser probably has the best claim of all to the title of 'chief offender' in the partition affair. It was Fraser, after all, who in his note of 28 March 1903 for the first time focused the discussion directly on the political benefits of a transfer of Dacca and Mymensingh. These districts, he argued, needed "strong personal government". "I believe that Dacca and Mymensingh would give far less trouble if they were under

[34] Risley's note of 7 February 1904—Home Public Progs A, February 1905, n. 155.

[35] Telegram from Secretary of State to Viceroy, 20 May 1905—Curzon Collection, MSS Eur, F. 111/175.

[36] Telegram from Viceroy to Secretary of State, 24 May 1905—*Ibid.*

[37] Curzon Collection, MSS Eur, F. 111/211 (Volume 32).

Assam. I also believe that East Bengal would not be so painfully prominent a factor in Bengal administration if this transfer were made."[38] Curzon's minute of 1 June 1903, in a passage to be carefully omitted six months later from the Risley letter which was otherwise its more or less faithful paraphrase, explicitly acknowledged its debt to Fraser—"There remains an argument to which the in-coming Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal, Sir A. Fraser, attaches the utmost weight, and which cannot be absent from our consideration. He has represented to me that the advantage of severing these eastern districts of Bengal, which are a hotbed of the purely Bengali movement, unfriendly if not seditious in character, and dominating the whole tone of Bengal administration, will immeasurably outweigh any possible drawbacks..."[39] Risley took up the cue with alacrity, in two notes of 7 February 1904 and 6 December 1904 analysing the arguments of the critics of the partition—"Bengal united is a power; Bengal divided will pull in several different ways. That is perfectly true and is one of the merits of the scheme. The only rejoinder that I can think of is that Bengal is very densely populated; that Eastern Bengal is the most densely populated portion, that it needs room for expansion and that it can only expand towards the East. So far from hindering national

[38] Fraser's note of 28 March 1903—Home Public Progs A, December 1903, n. 149-60.

[39] Curzon's Minute, *op. cit.*, para 47. The passage goes on to refer to Fraser's conviction, derived from his work on the police commission, "that nowhere in India are the officers of government more ignorant of, or more divorced from, the people". A comparison with the Risley letter, para 25 (meant for public consumption) is instructive: "There remains an argument to which no small weight attaches and which cannot be left out of consideration. The government of India have reason to believe—and their impressions were strongly confirmed by the enquiries of the Police Commission—that there is no portion of Bengal where the drawbacks of an imperfectly supervised administration are more evident than in these outlying districts of its eastern border, and that nowhere is the absence of close and intimate touch between the officers of government and the people more apparent or more regrettable."

development we are really giving it greater scope, and enabling Bengal to absorb Assam."[40] And, even more devastatingly frank—"It is not altogether easy to reply in a despatch which is sure to be published without disclosing the fact that in this scheme as in the matter of the amalgamation of Berar to the Central Provinces one of our main objects is to split up and thereby weaken a solid body of opponents to our rule."[41]

The "solid body of opponents" has reference, of course, to the predominantly Hindu nationalist public opinion; the Muslims, as Minto explained to Morley as late as 5 February 1906, had been "inactive so far"—"it is only the Hindu population . . . which constitutes the political voice of the province".[42] But the possibilities of divide and rule in the more familiar communal sense of the term were not entirely absent from the minds of the partition-makers, though this was at first a subsidiary motive. Curzon in his speech at Dacca (18 February 1904), as is well known, declared that the scheme "would invest the Mohammedans in Eastern Bengal with a unity which they have not enjoyed since the days of the old Mussulman viceroys and kings. . ."[43] Even before Curzon, several subordinate officers of the Bengal government had drawn pointed attention to this aspect of the plan, with the commissioner of Dacca even suggesting a division along the Hooghly into two provinces, one predominantly Muslim, the other Hindu.[44] The government of India's letter of 13 Sept-

[40] Note of 7 February 1904—Home Public Progs A, February 1905, n. 155. Compare Curzon's speech at Mymensingh, 20 February 1904: " . . . the Bengal people, instead of being the predominant element in one local administration, would, in future, become the predominant element in two"—P. Mukherji, *All About Partition* (1905), p. 47.

[41] Note of 6 December 1904—Home Public Progs A, February 1905, n. 164.

[42] Minto Papers, M 1005.

[43] *All About Partition*, p. 39.

[44] Calcutta was to be placed directly under the government of India. Letter No. 217 J, Commissioner of Dacca Division to Chief Secretary of Government of Bengal, 15 February 1904. The district magistrates

ember 1904, conveying what was really the final draft of the partition plan, emphasised that Dacca in course of time would acquire "the special character of a Provincial Capital where Mohammedan interests would be strongly represented if not predominant".[45] That such solicitude was entirely disinterested, as McLane seems to think, is a little difficult to swallow.

The partition scheme in its final form was mainly the work of Fraser and Risley. Curzon was on holiday in England during much of 1904, and the acting viceroy, Lord Ampthill, took little interest in the matter.[46] But the ultimate responsibility, of course, was Curzon's, and as his correspondence with the secretary of state reveals, it was his insistence above all which virtually imposed the plan on a by no means enthusiastic Brodrick and his council.[47] And what spurred Curzon on was, pretty obviously, a political motive: "The Bengalis, who like to think themselves a nation, and who dream of a future when the English will have been turned out, and a Bengali Babu will be installed in Government House, Calcutta, of course bitterly resent any disruption that will be likely to interfere with the realisation of this dream.

of Dacca and Mymensingh in their notes of 26/28 January and 5 February 1904 also emphasised the need for promoting Muslim interests. Enclosed with Government of Bengal Letter No. 2556 J of 6 April 1904 --Home Public Progs A, February 1905, n. 157.

[45] Government of India to Government of Bengal, Letter No. 1902 of 13 September 1904—*Ibid*, n. 159.

[46] The Ampthill Papers contain only stray references to the partition scheme.

[47] Brodrick rather pathetically confessed in a letter to Curzon on 3 March 1905: "As you may imagine, on this as on many other subjects, I am only writing as to what the opinions of others may be; for it is far too vast a problem for me to believe it possible to study it...seeing the strong view you take upon this, I will back the whole of your scheme, so far as it lies in my power..." The under-secretary of state, Sir Arthur Godley, however, was much more enthusiastic—"This is a tremendously big thing that you have achieved... As you know, I have myself from the first believed in your scheme..."—Godley to Curzon, 30 May 1905—Curzon Collection, MSS Eur, F. 111/164 (Volume 9).

If we are weak enough to yield to their clamour now, we shall not be able to dismember or reduce Bengal again; and you will be cementing and solidifying, on the eastern flank of India, a force already formidable, and certain to be a source of increasing trouble in the future."[48]

A final confirmation of the essentially political character of the partition may be found in Minto's memorandum on the subject, dated 5 February 1906. There was little love lost between the new viceroy and his predecessor, and Minto had no doubt at all that the whole thing had been "carried through with an unfortunate disregard for local sentiment and public opinion". Yet partition should and must be maintained, since "the diminution of the power of Bengali political agitation will assist to remove a serious cause for anxiety... It is the growing power of a population with great intellectual gifts and a talent for making itself heard, a population which, though it is very far from representing the more manly characteristics of the many races of India, is not unlikely to influence public opinion at home most mischievously. Therefore from a political point of view alone, putting aside the administrative difficulties of the old province, I believe partition to have been very necessary..."[49]

II. Bengal on the Eve of the Swadeshi Upsurge

"Conceive the howls! They will almost slay me in Bengal"—wrote Curzon in high good humour to Ampthill on 8 June 1905, conveying the news that the partition plan had been sanctioned at last.[50] The governor of Madras agreed that the "howls" would be terrible—"but from what Sir Andrew Fraser told me I should imagine that they would not last long or lead to any real disturbance of the peace".[51] The campaign against the partition so far had followed the beaten track of

[48] Curzon to Brodrick (in train, from Chittagong to Dacca), 17 February 1904—Curzon Collection, MSS Eur, F. 111/163 (Volume 8).
[49] Minto to Morley, 5 February 1906—Minto Papers, M 1005.
[50] Curzon Collection, MSS Eur, F. 111/210 (Volume 31).
[51] Ampthill to Curzon, 19 June 1905—*Ibid.*

petitions, conferences, and verbal pyrotechnics, and so the bureaucrats still believed with Ibbetson that "the native... will quickly become accustomed to the new conditions".[52] But, with startling rapidity after July 1905 the movement broke away from all traditional moorings, developed new techniques of militant action, and broadened into a struggle for swaraj. The historian of swadeshi has to try to explain how this happened and why all the calculations of the officials went awry.

As Risley's note of 7 February 1904[53] indicates, the bureaucratic mind tended to interpret the whole antipartition movement in terms of machinations by a number of interest-groups. The 'babus' of Vikrampur, argued Risley, were afraid that their dominant position in the subordinate administrative services of Bengal would be lost; zamindars with lands on both sides of the proposed new border would now need two sets of agents and pleaders, the Bhagyakul Roys with raw jute and rice-trade interests centred at Hatkhola near Calcutta feared the rise of an alternative route through Chittagong; Calcutta lawyers were nervous that the jurisdiction of the high court might be reduced ultimately; transfer to a chief commissioner's province would deprive East Bengal politicians of the chance of sitting in legislative councils; and the power and predominance of Calcutta and Bengal in Congress politics would of course receive a mortal and well-calculated blow. The analysis of Risley was realistic enough, so far as it went—every one of these arguments appeared in the pamphlets and petitions of the 1903-5 period directed against the partition.[54] The enlarged scheme for a new province complete with the paraphernalia of legislative council and board of revenue did satisfy some of the early objectors,[55] and converted a big section of the Muslim gentry under

[52] Denzil Ibbetson's note of 8 February 1904—Home Public Progs A, February 1905, n. 155.

[53] *Ibid.*

[54] For an analysis of some of these pamphlets, cf. below, Chapter II.

[55] Thus at a Belvedere Conference attended by sixteen leading Dacca and Mymensingh zamindars (Hindu as well as Muslim) on 26 Decem-

Salimulla into enthusiastic admirers of partition. That politicians of the old school by themselves would have posed no great problem is indicated by Ambicacharan Majumdar's speech in the Bengal Legislative Council on 8 July 1905: "Sir, the struggle of a helpless people is probably over, and here drops the curtain over one of the saddest tragedies ever enacted on the political stage in this country." The speech ended with a call to "roll up the map of Bengal"—in a conscious, if somewhat farcical, imitation of Pitt after Austerlitz.[56] Just one month later, Ambicacharan had to eat his own words before a huge crowd assembled at the Town Hall on 7 August: "I said that the struggle was over. It now seems to me that the real struggle has just begun."[57]

What officials and old-style politicians had underestimated was evidently the sense of unity among the Bengali-speaking people—a sentiment certainly by no means all-pervasive, but still extending far beyond the narrow coteries of zamindars, lawyers, and Congress leaders whose interests had engrossed Risley's attention in February 1904. Due to its geographical position, the Bengal region during the thousand years preceding the British conquest had enjoyed long periods of autonomy and unity centred successively around Gaur, Dacca and Murshidabad. Much more important than memories of such feudal independence, however, were the undoubted facts of linguistic and literary unity, and the emergence of something like a common culture at the village level based on an amalgam of Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim and primitive

ber 1903, the consensus was that the Risley scheme was acceptable provided Faridpur and Bakargunj were also transferred. "There are many zamindars of Dacca and Mymensingh who hold lands also in the other two districts, and it would for obvious reasons be exceedingly difficult for them to manage estates lying outside their own province." Such zamindars included Sitanath Roy and his brothers, "very influential opponents of the present scheme". Government of Bengal to Government of India (Home), No. 2556 J of 6 April 1904, paras 24-25—*Ibid*, n. 157.

[56] Prithwischandra Ray, *The Case Against the Break-up of Bengal (1905)*, Appendix 1.

[57] *Ibid*, p. xii.

folk elements.[58] On this came to be superimposed the more obvious unity of the English-educated bhadralok and its greatest creation—nineteenth-century Bengali literature. Calcutta had become the real metropolis for the whole of Bengal, attracting students from all districts, sending out its graduates to teach in mufassil colleges and far-flung village schools, serving as the apex of the whole legal system and profession, and functioning also as the centre of trade by railway, river and ocean. Districts like Dacca, Barisal, Comilla or Mymensingh responded eagerly to impulses of social reform or political activity originating in Calcutta. Risley cited a census report underlying the importance of Dacca in the life of Bengal—"Its boatmen ply on every river in Bengal, and its babus are found earning their livelihood throughout Bengal and Assam and even further afield"—and added that Vikrampur pargana in Dacca supplied "nearly one-third of the subordinate native officials in the government offices of Bengal".[59] Differences remained, of course—the dialect of Chittagong was and is virtually incomprehensible to a man from West Bengal, the inhabitant of Calcutta tended to look down upon the people of the eastern districts as rustic 'Bangals', and the primary loyalties to village, caste, district[60] or religious community were still extremely important. But social mobility, a standard literary language, and modern agencies like newspapers were gradually reducing these differences, and by 1905 the sense of identity was strong enough for partition to provoke widespread anger and lead to a genuine patriotic outburst.

By the politically-conscious, partition was resented additionally as coming as a kind of last straw in a long series of humiliations. The very modest demands of the educated bhadralok for jobs in the civil service and some reforms in the councils had nearly all been brushed aside. Nearly twenty years of Congress agitation, the passing of innumerable resolutions,

[58] Cf. below, Chapter VIII (i).
[59] Note of 7 February 1904, *op. cit.*
[60] A mufassil student coming to Calcutta would generally take up his residence at a "mess" run by young men from his home district.

the logically faultless exposure of 'un-British rule'—all this had only effected the paltry reforms of 1892, a Commons resolution on simultaneous examinations which remained unimplemented, and the almost equally futile Welby Commission. And now things were getting worse instead of better, with a viceroy determined to treat the Congress as an "unclean thing" and rejecting all overtures made by its leaders "with the same polite but frigid indifference"[61]—a viceroy whose achievements in six years included reduction of the elected element in the Calcutta Corporation, a Universities Act which most people felt was essentially an attempt to tighten official control over education, an Official Secrets Act curbing press freedom, and a convocation speech claiming "that the highest ideal of truth is to a large extent a Western conception".[62]

Political disappointment affected directly only a limited circle; more important probably was the cumulative effect of racial discrimination and arrogance (of which the convocation address of February 1905 was such a glaring instance). Cases of assault, seldom punished by the courts; white arrogance on trains and steamers and in offices and factories; unfair treatment in matters of pay and promotion—none of these things were new, of course, but still we get the impression of worsening race-relations, as the jingoism of the new imperialist age percolated through innumerable channels into the minds and behaviour of Anglo-India. The unpopularity among his compatriots of even Curzon—surely no 'native'-lover—after the Rangoon and Sialkot incidents (1809, 1902) and the Bain case (1904) must have been a revelation to sensitive Indians.[63] The Indian newspapers continually focused on such themes, which could unite the proudest zamindar or bhadralok with the meanest of plebeians, as the indigo riots and the

[61] Curzon to Ampthill, 15 June 1903, describing his attitude towards the Congress, Curzon Collection, MSS Eur. F. 111/207 (Volume 28).
[62] Quoted in Haridas and Uma Mukherji, *India's Fight for Freedom*, p. 25.
[63] Ronaldshay, *Life of Curzon*, Volume II (1928), Chapters V, XVII, XXIV.

Assam coolies issue had already indicated. On 28 November 1903, the *Bengalee* reported a move by Sarala Ghoshal to raise a fund "for the succour of the helpless widow and children of the punkha coolie" who had been kicked to death at Barrackpore a few days before.

Economic distress added to the fires of political frustration and racial injustice. Faith in the 'providential' British connection was difficult to maintain in face of the repeated famines and epidemics of the 1890s. Though the Bengali bhadralok's region and community had escaped the worst ravages of both, his conscience could not but be deeply stirred—and from Naoroji, Digby, Ranade and Dutt he was learning to attribute the poverty of the Indian masses to British exploitation and drain of wealth. A more direct impetus was also not lacking, as the liberal professions became overcrowded[64] and as prices rose sharply from 1905 onwards.[65]

[64] There were 80 muktears in Madaripur subdivision alone, as a headmaster complained while urging national education and swadeshi enterprise—Kedarnath Dasgupta, *Shikshar Andolan* (1312/1905), speech by Kaliprasanna Dasgupta.

[65] The following unweighted index numbers for wholesale prices were constructed by the K. L. Dutta report:

(Average for 1890-1894=100)

	1903	'04	'05	'06	'07	'08
All-India Average	107	106	116	129	133	143
Calcutta	104	105	113	126	131	140
Bengal (North & East)	106	105	116	136	143	146
Bengal (South & West)	107	106	116	135	142	149

Prices had been high also in the famine years 1897 and 1900 (all-India averages of 121 and 122), but after 1905 prices were rising despite the absence of big natural calamities—and the curve is steepest for the years 1905-8, the all-India average being only 141 in 1912. For the full table, see K. L. Dutta, *Report on the Enquiry into the Rise of Prices in India (1914-1915)*, Volume I, pp. ii, 32, 40-41.

Official reports frequently emphasise the distress caused by these two factors among the predominantly Hindu bhadra-lok intermediate tenure-holders, and try to relate this directly with the "unhealthy political activity" of such people in the swadeshi days and in the revolutionary movement which followed it.[66] Perhaps the link between economics and politics is not that simple, but it still seems a significant fact that the major strongholds of swadeshi in the mufassil—areas like Bakargunj, Madaripur, Vikrampur, Kishoregunj—tended to be regions where a marked concentration of intermediate tenures coincided with a relatively high level of English education.[67]

Some interesting confirmation of all this comes from the pages of an unpublished diary, kept between October 1904 and February 1907 by Gyanchandra Banerji, a munsiff in the provincial civil service who later wrote regularly for the *Modern Review* under the pen-name 'Politicus'. A very human document, it is marked throughout by a tone of intense bitterness and frustration. The author is condemned to a lowly job in the judicial service where the maximum pay is only Rs 200, as against the white district judge's Rs 2000, and gets in addition only a meagre income from his ancestral holding in Vikrampur.[68] The distant whistle of the Goalundo steamer brings to his mind memories of racial discrimination aboard trains and steamers.[69] "Every day", he complains, "the struggle for existence is becoming keener, and the policy of the Government in the matter of bestowing its patronage more reactionary."[70] And the very first entry in the journal refers to the poverty of India—"She [India] is constantly uttering

[66] *Bengal District Administration Committee Report 1913-1914* (1915), p. 175, and Chapters II, IX; *Administration of Bengal under Andrew Fraser, 1903-1908*, pp. 9, 30-35.

[67] For a more detailed discussion of this very interesting problem, cf. below, Chapter VII and Chapter X.

[68] Unpublished Diary of Gyanchandra Banerji, entries for 12 October and 15 October 1904.

[69] *Ibid*, 16 October 1904.

[70] *Ibid*, 7 December 1904.

the melancholy refrain Ham bhuka hai! and her cry is interpreted by the Anglo-Indian bureaucracy to the Secretary of State for India as the blessings of a contented country for the peace and prosperity which reigns among the teeming millions."[71]

Yet Gyanchandra's diary is not just a tale of frustration and woe. There are frequent ecstatic references to the new Japan,[72] pride at Bengali achievements (Sureshchandra Biswas in Brazil, the researches of Jagadischandra Basu),[73] and even a conviction that "the rise of Japan as a world power, the methods of social-democrats in Germany and Russia, are regarded as object-lessons, which will not fail to produce their effect in India".[74] "Signs of a national reawakening", he says, are manifest on every side[75]—and Gyanchandra reveals particular enthusiasm about the selfhelp scheme being promoted by J. C. Ghosh's Association for the Scientific and Industrial Education of Indians.[76]

Thus if grievances were mounting, so too was the new mood of confidence, pride in the heritage and potentialities of the country, and selfreliance. The Bengali bhadralok's confidence in himself derived in part, no doubt, from the privileged position his community had come to occupy throughout upper India by virtue of having been the first to take to English education enthusiastically. This lead was still there, though it was being threatened and rapidly cut down by the growth of educated elites in the United Provinces, Bihar, Orissa and Assam. A second, and worthier, source of pride lay in the undoubted achievements in the domain of culture. In literature, in science, and soon in painting, too, Bengal was on the point of winning world recognition. Rabindranath in one of his early poems had dreamt of

[71] *Ibid*, Preface to the Diary.

[72] *Ibid*, 1 November, 2 November, 12 November 1904; 31 May 1905.

[73] *Ibid*, 6 December 1904, 6 June 1906.

[74] *Ibid*, 1 April 1905.

[75] *Ibid*, 16 June 1905.

[76] *Ibid*, 29 October and 4 November 1904.

achieving for his country a place of honour in the world,[77] soon a fellow-countryman and poet would hail him as the 'master of song' and the man in whom all Bengalis took pride.[78] As in other nationalist movements, there was also a quest for a past which had to be glorious, and in the particular context of our country this search commonly took the form of Hindu revivalism. Ludicrous at times, as in Sasadhar Tarkachuramani and the claims sometimes made in the 1880s and '90s that all the achievements of modern science were known to the ancient Hindu rishis, revivalism still served as a major stimulus for radicalism even while creating serious problems for the future. The influence of Bankimchandra's *Anandamath* and Anushilan-creed and Vivekananda's fiery gospel on a whole generation of patriotic and militant Bengali youths is too obvious and well known to need much amplification. Among lesser personalities, we must not forget Bijoykrishna Goswami, the Brahmo preacher turned Vaishnavite who became the 'guru' of no less than four key figures of the swadeshi movement—Bepinchandra Pal, Aswinikumar Dutta, Satischandra Mukherji and Monoranjan Guha Thakurta.

The mood of selfreliance and confidence in the heritage of the East was enormously strengthened by events abroad. The Boer War had tarnished the image of British strength; the unexpected Japanese victory of 1904-5 blew up the myth of European superiority and sent a thrill of pride through the whole of Asia. The Bengali newspapers of these years are full of Japan, funds in aid of Japanese sick and wounded were collected through public entertainments at City College

[77] *Biswer majhare thnai nai bole*
Knaditechhe bangabhumi.
Gan geye kabi jagater tale
Sthan kine dao tumi
—"*Ahaban-Geet*", *Kari o Komol* (1886) : R.R.II, 115.

[78] *Jagat-kabi-sabhay mora tomar kari garba*
Bangali aj ganer raja, bangali nahe kharba.
— Satyendranath Dutt

and Overtoun Hall,[79] Sarala Debi thought of organising a Bengali Red Cross,[80] and there were even cases of children being given nick-names after Japanese leaders![81] Then came the Chinese boycott of American goods in protest against immigration laws—noted as worthy of emulation by the *Sanjibani* and the *Hitavarta* just a few weeks before the beginning of the boycott movement in Bengal in July 1905.[82] Other external influences included Okakura with his pan-Asiatic dreams (*The Ideals of the East* had come out in 1902) and Nivedita, the daughter of Ireland, with her first-hand acquaintance with European revolutionary movements. Later on, we find references to Russian events—though, significantly enough, reports of terrorist activities seem to have struck the imagination of Bengal much more than peasant risings or the novel methods of strikes and soviets.

Thus the ground had been well prepared in Bengal for a decisive turn away from 'mendicant' agitation and for a close association of the new radical politics with Hindu revivalism. Yet there were also signs that the very same soil could produce tares as well—conscious anti-British sentiment was still mainly confined to the educated (and mainly Hindu) Bhadralok, and the relations between this elite and the peasant masses were to be plagued throughout by unconscious assumptions of social superiority. Gyanchandra Banerji, undoubtedly moved as he was by the poverty of his country in the abstract, had still no doubt at all that "the Tenancy Act was based on the 'Village Hampden' theory, and it has served only to embitter village life to all classes concerned".[83] He was also absolutely sure that "if the masses are placed under the guidance of an enlightened class, their condition is sure

[79] Unpublished Diary of Sukumar Mitra, entries for 11 March and 4 April 1904.
[80] Unpublished Diary of Gyanchandra Banerji, entry for 1 November 1904.
[81] I know personally of at least three 'Togos', and one 'Nogi'.
[82] *Sanjibani*, 22 June 1905; *Hitavarta*, 25 June 1905—RNP(B) for the week ending 1 July 1905.
[83] *Op. cit.*, entry dated 10 October 1904.

to be ameliorated".[84] Even small unearned rent-incomes strangely inhibit the social thought of their possessors, as extremism would reveal soon enough. The author of *An Open Letter to Curzon* (April 1904) was equally confident that the masses recognise "that their natural leaders, the educated classes, are disinterestedly fighting to get rid of the evils". The pamphlet then quoted Burke's definition of public opinion, given in his *Regicide Peace*, as the views of men with leisure, means of information, and a position "above menial dependence".[85] Edmund Burke is not perhaps the best patron saint for a nationalist movement which seeks to be democratic.

[84] *Ibid*, 29 October 1904.
[85] *An Open Letter to Curzon*, pp. 6-7—Home Public Progs Deposit, April 1904, n. 39.

Chapter Two

TRENDS IN BENGAL'S SWADESHI MOVEMENT*

The politics of Bengal's swadeshi age at first sight appears to present a fairly simple picture of a united movement against the partition gradually splitting up into 'moderate' and 'extremist' (or 'nationalist') currents, with the second trend eventually developing into 'terrorism' (or what Dr R.C. Majumdar likes to call 'militant nationalism'). This is the framework accepted by most historians of the period,[1] and I began my own work with similar ideas.

In course of my research, however, I began to find it increasingly difficult to fit the extremely rich ideological controversies of the age concerning objectives, techniques, and social ideals into this threefold scheme. I also came across some contemporary evidence indicating an awareness of a more complicated situation. The Editorial Reflections entitled "The 'Moderates' and the 'Extremists' " in Prithwischandra Ray's *Indian World* of March-April 1907 note three subdivisions within each of the above two broad categories. The moderates all share an "attachment to the British connection" and consider colonial selfgovernment to be the ulti-

*** A first draft of this chapter was published in the *Bengal Past and Present*, January-July, July-December 1965.**

[1] Cf. for instance, the numerous writings of Haridas and Uma Mukherji; R. C. Majumdar's *History of the Freedom Movement*, Volume II (1963); Amales Tripathi's *The Extremist Challenge* (1967); and Daniel Argov's *Moderates and Extremists in the Indian Nationalist Movement* (1967). Bimanbihari Majumdar in his *Militant Nationalism in India* (1966) has referred to Prithwischandra Ray's classification of the extremists into three categories in 1907 (p. 75), but he has not tried to develop this interesting hint.

mate goal, but they include subgroups of loyalist aristocrats, very cautious politicians of the Mehta-Gokhale brand, and the Bengal variety. The last-named no longer have much faith in the British, but still desire the continuance of British rule purely on grounds of expediency; they are supposed to stand for "a most active and persistent policy of passive resistance". The extremists in their turn are divided into the 'Tagore group' advocating selfhelp and autonomous development ignoring British rule; those who feel British rule to be "incompatible with our national progress" and want to "*prepare*" for its overthrow; and those wanting to force the British to "clear out of India *at once*".

Not all the subgroups seem equally important or relevant for a study of Bengal during the years 1903-8. Loyalists pure and simple demand little attention in an analysis of nationalist trends. The distinction between the Bengal moderates and the Mehta group has some basis. Bepinchandra Pal in an article (1909) on Krishnakumar Mitra remarked thankfully that there were no Gokhales or Mehtas in Bengal;[2] Hemendraprasad Ghosh mentions two reconciliation bids by Bhupendranath Bose in 1908 after the Surat split which were spurned by Pherozeshah Mehta;[3] and that some kind of a united platform was still possible in Bengal was indicated by the Pabna and Hooghly provincial conferences of February 1908 and September 1909.[4] But this distinction is not very important in a study deliberately confined to Bengal alone. The statement that men like Surendranath were standing consistently for passive resistance is rather dubious, and it probably reflects the writer's eagerness to make this trend—which he obviously prefers—more acceptable in an increasingly radical Bengal. The distinction between the

[2] Reprinted in *Character-Sketches* (1957).

[3] Hemendraprasad Ghosh, *Congress* (1921), pp. 216-23.

[4] For the decisions of the Pabna Conference, see Home Political Progs A, March 1909, n. 10, Annexure B; and for an account of the Hooghly Conference, Home Political Progs B, November 1909, n. 103-4.

last two extremist subgroups remains vague, but perhaps may be interpreted as a tactful way of referring to the difference between advocates of passive resistance and believers in armed struggle or 'terrorism'.

A fourfold classification thus begins to emerge—moderates; the trend towards selfdevelopment without inviting an immediate political clash (which I have decided to call 'constructive swadeshi' for want of a better name); political extremism using 'extended boycott' or passive resistance in addition to selfhelp efforts; and terrorism. The *Indian World* analysis was made by a friend of Surendranath, but it is interesting that the article was summarised within a few weeks in the pages of the *Bande Mataram*, the newspaper representing the opposite end of the political spectrum.[5] Even more significant is the fact that Aurobindo's brilliant series of articles on passive resistance[6] seem to assume a similar frame of reference. Here the programme of the "new party" is sharply demarcated not only from "petitioning" but also from mere "selfdevelopment and selfhelp"—the latter being criticised for ignoring basic political realities.[7] Aurobindo also distinguishes between the present programme of passive resistance and "aggressive resistance" culminating in "armed revolt"—the latter is not ruled out in principle if repression gets more intense, but will obviously be quite a distinct method. Finally, the revolutionary Bhupendranath Dutta in an account written in the 1920s and revised in 1949 made the categorical assertion that the opponents of moderate "mendicancy" in swadeshi Bengal—all too often mistakenly considered to be part of a single camp—in reality included three distinct groups: the followers of "Rabi Babu's Swadeshi

[5] *Bande Mataram*, 21 May 1907.

[6] *Ibid*, 9-23 April 1907—reprinted in Aurobindo, *Doctrine of Passive Resistance* (1948).

[7] "... to attempt social reform, educational reform, industrial expansion, the moral improvement of the race without aiming first and foremost at political freedom, is the very height of ignorance and futility." —*Doctrine of Passive Resistance*, p. 3.

Samaj movement", the extremists led by men like Pal, and the revolutionaries.[8]

The contemporary confusion noted by Bhupendranath and perpetuated by historians has led to the virtual ignoring of the autonomous stature of constructive swadeshi as one kind of reaction against moderate politics. There has been a strong tendency also to consider the extremism of the 1905-8 period as merely a kind of preparation for that revolutionary terrorism which has such glamour in Bengal even today. Thus while the theoretical contributions of Pal and Aurobindo to the techniques of passive resistance are fairly well known, relatively little attention has been paid so far by historians to the practical application of these methods in the swadeshi period. The shift to methods of individual violence is regarded as a matter of course, an inevitable reflex of British repression—the crucial question left unasked is why a sustained mass movement could not develop on the basis of passive resistance techniques (as happened later in the Gandhian era) despite repression.

Another important but neglected theme is the ideological conflict between modernism and traditionalism—between an attitude which broadly speaking demands social reforms, tries to evaluate things and ideas by the criteria of reason and present-day utility, and bases itself on a humanism seeking to transcend limits of caste and religion; and a logically opposite trend which defends and justifies existing social mores in the name of immemorial tradition and the glorious past, and which tends to substitute emotion and faith for reason. This is a conflict which can be traced right through the nineteenth century from the days of the Atmiya Sabha and the Dharma Sabha,[9] and it continued at the heart of the swadeshi movement just as in the 'renaissance' which had

[8] Bhupendranath Dutta, *Bharater dwitiya swadinata sangram* (3rd Edition, 1949), pp. 50, 158.

[9] For an interpretation of the Bengal renaissance in terms of such an underlying ideological conflict, see S. C. Sarkar, "Rabindranath Tagore and the Renaissance in Bengal", *Enquiry*, No. 5 (1961).

preceded and prepared the way for it. In so far as the swadeshi age saw a determined though not entirely successful effort to give the national movement a solid mass basis, the period can be regarded as a sort of test for the relevance of these opposed ideological trends in the work of national awakening.

A study of a period which tries to distinguish trends always runs the risk of becoming too mechanical or schematic. Clarity demands the isolation of logically distinct tendencies, the 'ideal-types' of Weberian jargon, but these do not necessarily or even usually imply clear-cut groups. Contradictory attitudes within a single man at different times (or sometimes even simultaneously) are not uncommon. The elements of unity also must not be ignored—thus almost all groups of Bengal patriots during 1905-8 opposed partition, supported boycott at least for a time and economic swadeshi throughout, participated to some extent in the national education movement, and talked (even if many often did not act) in terms of selfreliance. I would like to add that the four trends which I have distinguished were not successive temporal stages; they may be found side by side with each other throughout the swadeshi age. But—and that is the vital point—their relative importance varied greatly with time. Thus mendicancy definitely predominated before 1905, terrorism became the most significant kind of nationalist activity after 1908, while the brief but fascinating intervening years saw the first try-out of the techniques of passive resistance in India. The whole framework should be regarded as a kind of abstract model, relevant only at a high level of generalisation, but useful perhaps in an exploration of those shifts within the movement, which in their totality reveal the inner logic or dynamics of the age.

1. The Moderate Tradition

The characteristic features of the moderate approach are fairly well-known. The moderates were marked out firstly by their English education, which had meant for most men of

their generation a fairly secure economic and social position in the legal and other liberal professions or government services. Combined often with income from land (also to some extent from business activities, particularly in Western India), this created an atmosphere of solid Victorian respectability and selfconfidence. Western education through a foreign medium in a colonial set-up brought new values and novel aspirations, and contributed to clear thinking on a national plane; at the same time, it produced a rather pathetic faith in the basic goodness of the 'providential' British connection and a distressing alienation from the masses. It is possible to overemphasise the narrowness or 'denationalised' character of the early Congress—if the moderates became unduly excited over issues like ICS examinations and revealed a significant fascination for the permanent settlement, they showed also a deep and very genuine concern over problems of Indian poverty, the conditions of plantation labour, and other basic questions affecting the common people. The critique of British economic exploitation of India worked out by men like Dadabhai Naoroji, G. V. Joshi, and R. C. Dutt was to remain standard throughout the later course of nationalism.[10] The social limitation comes out clearly, however, in Gokhale's assertions that the educated classes are the "natural leaders of the people", and that political rights are being demanded in fact "not for the whole population, but for such portion of it as has been qualified by education to discharge properly the responsibilities of such association";[11] or in Surendranath's assumption that national unity means primarily the unity of the English-educated.[12] "We in fact now live the life of the English", declared Sankaran Nair, the president of the 1897 Congress.[13]

[10] Bipan Chandra, *Rise and Growth of Economic Nationalism in India* (1966).

[11] Presidential address of G. K. Gokhale at the Banaras Congress (1905) —K. P. Karunakaran, *Modern Indian Political Tradition* (1962), p. 102.

[12] Address on Indian Unity to the Students' Association, Calcutta, 16 March 1878—*Ibid*, p. 40.

[13] Daniel Argov, *op. cit.*, p. 78.

Given this background, the fundamental technique of political agitation inevitably became an appeal to the conscience of the British—not of the 'sun-dried' bureaucrats of Anglo-India who were soon given up as hopeless, but of the great and liberal-minded electorate of the land of Cobden, Bright, Mill, Gladstone and Morley. To make this appeal effective, educated opinion in India had to be mobilised through speeches and pamphlets (almost all delivered or written in English), and a logically flawless case had to be presented to the British public proving how "un-British" the rule of England was becoming. The goal was equally clear—constitutional, administrative and economic reforms, proceeding step by step, broadening from precedent to precedent, till Indians gained all the rights of "British citizens"[14] and acquired colonial selfgovernment. Such objectives and methods demanded little in the way of sustained mass work, and the political associations, quite numerous on paper, remained essentially tiny coteries which 'elected' delegates and office-bearers from among themselves, organised meetings and petitions when the government did something particularly atrocious, and otherwise enjoyed long spells of complacent hibernation. The Congress was an annual forum, not a proper political party with regular membership; it did not even have a constitution before 1899, and the rules drawn up at the Lucknow session also remained largely on paper. Thus the Indian Congress Committee withered away after 1901, and everything continued to be managed as of old by the caucus leaders—Hume, Wedderburn, W. C. Bonnerji, Pherozeshah Mehta, Dinshaw Wacha, G. K. Gokhale, Ananda Charlu, Madanmohan Malaviya and Surendranath Banerji.[15]

Surendranath had dominated Bengal politics for a whole generation prior to 1905, and he remained a force to be reckoned with in the swadeshi days—maintaining contact through

[14] Naoroji at the Calcutta Congress (1906)—Karunakaran, *op. cit.*, p. 50.
[15] Daniel Agrov, *op. cit.*, pp. 81-89.

a voluminous political correspondence with Calcutta and mufassil leaders,[16] and counting among his intimates men as different in ideas and temperament as Krishnakumar Mitra the fiery Brahmo originator of the boycott call, the swadeshi organiser Jogeshchandra Chaudhuri, cautious party managers like Bhupendranath Bose or Prithwischandra Ray, and the one-time Brahmo-baiter Kaliprasanna Kabyabisharod. This group virtually dominated the Bengal press world, through the *Bengalee*, the *Hitabadi* and the *Sanjibani*. A second circle formed round Motilal Ghosh with his *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, whose family enmity with Surendranath dating back from the 1870s led him to flirt at times with the extremists without really becoming part of them.[17] The extreme right wing of the moderate camp was represented in 1905 by Narendranath Sen with his *Indian Mirror* and Nababidhan Brahmo associations; Nagendranath Ghosh, journalist and Metropolitan College principal; and the socially orthodox *Bangabasi* group—the latter a salutary reminder that Hindu revivalism did not always connote political radicalism.

The traditional techniques of moderate 'agitation' got a full trial during the first phase of the antipartition movement, from December 1903 to July 1905. Here was an issue which could move much broader sections than municipal reorganisation or the Universities Bill, and the established political leaders jumped into the fray with a furious press

[16] The Private Papers of Aswinicoomar Banerji contain 46 letters from Surendranath, though their tone makes clear that personally they were not on particularly intimate terms (they are invariably addressed 'Mr Banerjea'). The letter from Simultala dated 6 June 1907 states: "I am in active correspondence with the district leaders in regard to the present situation"—the reference being to the new Education Circular of May 1907.

[17] For the policy of Motilal Ghosh's *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, see below, Chapter VII. Paramananda Dutt's statement that Motilal was "the leader of the extremists" is not borne out by the contemporary evidence, and the biographer himself mentions a few pages later that Curzon's private secretary Walter Lawrence was an old friend of Motilal's, and that his hero used to become ecstatic when recalling an interview with the Prince of Wales in 1905—*Memoirs of Motilal Ghosh* (1935), pp. 158, 162-64.

campaign, meetings galore (particularly in Dacca and Mymensingh districts), numerous petitions,[18] and two big conferences at the Calcutta Town Hall in March 1904 and January 1905 attended by many mufassil delegates. The movement united big zamindars so long noted for their loyalism and Congress leaders drawn mainly from the liberal professions—the 'Mukherjis' and the 'Banerjis' had joined hands, forgetting for a time that rivalry on which Rabindranath had acidly commented in 1898.[19] Maharajas and rajas no doubt made the movement more respectable, even if some of their speeches sound a bit ludicrous today—thus we have Maharaja Manindrachandra Nandi claiming "a hereditary right to advise the government", since "My house has been associated with the genesis of British rule. The founder of my family was a friend of Warren Hastings and on a critical occasion saved his life." And all this at the Town Hall meeting of 7 August 1905 which passed the boycott resolution![20] Much more significant in the long run however were the first efforts to draw in others besides the English-educated. Thus the Mymensingh Association urged the need to organise petitions in Bengali, [21] and H. H. Risley in a very interesting analysis of the early stages of the movement noted the anxiety of the "literate class" "to secure cooperation in the agitation of all

[18] Thus a list of 69 memorials is appended to the commissioner of Dacca division's letter No. 217 J of 15 February 1904—enclosed with Bengal Government Letter, No. 2556 J of 6 April 1904—Home Public Progs A, February 1905, n. 156. Some of the more important memorials were later published in Parliamentary Papers, House of Commons, 1906, Volume 81, Cd. 2746 (*Further Papers Relating to the Reconstitution of Bengal and Assam*). A petition with 70,000 signatures was sent to the secretary of state from East Bengal in July 1905 (*Bengalee*, 14 July 1905).

[19] "Mukhujje banam barujje" and "Apar paksher katha"—*Bharati*, Bhadra, Aswin 1305 (1898), R.R.X.

[20] Prithwischandra Ray, *The Case Against the Break-up of Bengal* (September 1905), p. vi.

[21] Letter of Anathbandhu Guha, secretary of the Mymensingh Association, 5 January 1904—cited in Mymensingh district magistrate W. B. Thomson's Note, No. 169 J, 5 February 1904, Home Public Progs A, February 1905, n. 156.

classes of society" and mentioned the efforts to collect signatures at melas (fairs) and religious festivals.[22]

The atmosphere of this first phase of the struggle against the partition is conveyed best by five contemporary pamphlets, all in English—*An Open Letter to Lord Curzon* (Dacca, April 1904), *The Case Against the Break-up of Bengal* (September 1905), *All About Partition* (September 1905), *The Partition Agitation Explained* (January 1906), and *The Partition Riddle* (March 1906). Except for the first, all were published from Calcutta after the meeting of 7 August 1905, and yet they say very little about boycott or swadeshi. The pamphlets are concerned rather with building-up a fool-proof logical case against the partition. With their copious extracts from speeches, memorials, newspaper articles and comments of friendly Englishmen, they seem to represent lawyers' briefs drawn up mainly for the benefit of public opinion in England rather than calls for popular action in India.

The arguments of administrative convenience generally used to justify partition—Bengal as overburdened, the neglect of Assam—were refuted fairly easily as reflecting only the selfish interests of the bureaucracy. If the Bengal administration was really overburdened, it was argued, relief might be given by separating linguistically-distinct Bihar and Orissa;[23] or, even better, through "organic changes" setting up a governor and executive council in Bengal on the model of the other two presidencies.[24] It is interesting that two British ex-civilians, C. C. Stevens and C. E. Buckland, made

[22] Note of 7 February 1904—Home Public Progs A, February 1905, n. 155.

[23] *An Open Letter to Lord Curzon* (1904), p. 4—Text in Home Public Deposit, April 1904, n. 39. Sir Henry Cotton's speech at the Town Hall meeting of January 1905, and the Dacca memorial to the lieutenant-governor of Bengal—*The Case Against the Break-up of Bengal* (1905), pp. 17, 61.

[24] Cotton, *Ibid*, p. 16. Memorial adopted by the Town Hall meeting of 18 March 1904—*Ibid*, pp. 40-42.

similar suggestions.[25] The demand for "organic changes" linked up the antipartition agitation with the general moderate platform of constitutional reform—a governor appointed from London might be expected to be more independent of Anglo-Indian pressure,[26] while an executive council would provide a lever for future demands for Indianisation as Risley feared.[27] The scheme of partition itself was attacked on many grounds. Apart from the crucial political and national argument (partition as a deliberate splitting-up of the Bengali people), various types of alleged concrete disadvantages were urged as arguments against the plan. The original scheme of transfer of Chittagong division, Dacca and Mymensingh meant a subordination to 'backward' Assam ruled by a chief commissioner. An argument carrying dangerous provincial undertones, it was still frequently used at least in the early stages—thus Raja Sitanath Roy Bahadur at the Town Hall meeting of 18 March 1904 : "I say it is no light matter for 11 millions of people to be driven to a strange land, to uncongenial clime, to the land of kala joar or black fever and to be forced to form alliance with strange people with whom we have nothing in common."[28] The *Bengalee* to its credit warned against offending Assamese sentiments,[29] and the *Open Letter to Lord Curzon* explained that what was feared was not "absorption by the Assamese", but "the extremely personal administration of Assam".[30] The Risley scheme would mean loss of the privileges of having a legislative council and a board of revenue, and perhaps reduce the jurisdiction of the Calcutta High Court. As for the enlarged scheme of partition, the public got to know of it only vaguely from

[25] C. C. Stevens, notes dated 24 February 1904 and 6 April 1904. C. E. Buckland, minute enclosed with Bengal Government Letter No. 2556 J of 6 April 1904—Home Public Progs A, February 1905, n. 157.
[26] Cotton, *op. cit.*
[27] Risley's note of 7 February 1904—Home Public Progs A, February 1905, n. 155.
[28] *All About Partition*, p. 64.
[29] *Bengalee*, 28 February 1904.
[30] *An Open Letter to Lord Curzon*, p. 9.

rumours and Curzon's hints in his Dacca and Mymensingh speeches (February 1904). But though details might remain unknown, any enlarged scheme involving a new lieutenant-governorship would mean a heavy additional expense and so a possible threat to the permanent settlement.[31] A partition would snap growing social ties between the different parts of Bengal, curtail employment opportunities particularly for Bikrampur people (as Risley admitted but held to be not particularly unfair[32]), possibly reduce educational facilities by separating Calcutta from East Bengal, hurt the economic interests of some Calcutta merchants through the development of Chittagong, and cause inconvenience to zamindars having lands on both sides of the new boundary. In private interviews with Lieutenant-Governor Fraser, Manindra Nandi described as "the main thing" the fact that "if the lieutenant-governor and board of revenue for part of my estates are at Dacca, I shall have to keep a set of mukhtears there as well as in Calcutta", and Nalinbihari Sircar "based his opposition on the ground that he believed that injury would be done to Calcutta trade by the development of Chittagong".[33] Such were the arguments against the partition during 1903-5, mixing up trivial grievances with points of principle, raising issues, some noble, others rather unworthy.

Yet the partition came despite all protests and arguments, and indeed this was hardly unnatural. As Tagore had pointed out in mid-1904, the very assumption that the British were likely to be moved by logical arguments proving how harmful the partition would be for Bengal revealed a pathetic faith in the underlying benevolence of the rulers: "If a tree were to plead with the man who is about to cut it down—'Your blows will kill me'—would that not be fatu-

[31] Town Hall Memorial, 18 March 1904—*Case Against the Break-up of Bengal*, p. 21.
[32] Note of 7 February 1904—*op. cit.*
[33] Fraser to Curzon, 10 August 1905. 8 October 1905—Curzon Collection, MSS Eur, F. 111/211 (Volume 32).

ous?"[34] Pal wrote bitterly in 1905 that "If anything could prove the utter futility of our socalled methods of constitutional political agitation... the history of the agitation against the proposal to partition Bengal has done it."[35] The great limitation of course was the absence of real sanctions behind the petitioning. Things like the Universities Act had been loudly attacked and then quietly accepted (without any effort to organise an alternative national system—as Rabindranath had deplored in a concluding note to his 1904 article on the Universities Bill),[36] and so the British can hardly be blamed for expecting a similar sequence of reactions over the partition ("The native...will quickly become accustomed to the new conditions"—Denzil Ibbetson).[37] As for the arguments themselves, Pal rightly pointed out later on that except for the basic point regarding the harm to national political interests, most had been irrelevant or even foolish.[38] He might have added that some of these (e.g. the loss of the privileges of having a legislative council and a board of revenue) had actually helped the British to extend the scheme (a new lieutenant-governor's province would have both), so much so that a later administrative report could have the cheek to claim that the final scheme "emanated from public discussion and public opinion rather than from the government itself".[39]

The actual enforcement of the partition produced a wave of resentment which for a time carried the Bengal moderate leaders well beyond the shores of old-style petitioning. Leaders like Surendranath toured the country urging through fiery

[34] "Bangabibhag", *Bangadarshan*, Jaistha 1311 (1904)—R.R.X, p. 615.
[35] "Agitation or Organisation", *New India*, 29 July 1905—reprinted in Pal, *Swadeshi and Swaraj* (1954), p. 39.
[36] *Bangadarshan*, Asar 1311 (1904)—R.R.III, p. 647.
[37] Note of 8 February 1904—Home Public Progs A, February 1905, n. 155.
[38] "Bangachhede banger abastha", I, II—*Bangadarshan*, Kartik, Agrahayan 1312 (1905).
[39] *Administration of Bengal under Andrew Fraser, 1903-1908*, p. 2

speeches the boycott of Manchester cloth and Liverpool salt; they also participated, though more hesitantly, in the national education movement, at least to the extent of being members of the National Council of Education and the bodies which had led up to it.[40] Men like Krishnakumar Mitra and Ambicacharan Majumdar became very closely associated with the militant volunteer or samiti movement, and moderate leaders gave support and advice to the strikers on the East Indian Railway.[41] The attempts to give a religious colour to the boycott movement in order to draw in the Hindu masses got the support of most moderate leaders despite their westernism. Surendranath even claimed later on that the whole idea of a swadeshi religious vow had been initiated by him while addressing a meeting in the courtyard of a temple at Magra.[42] And there are even stories current in Bengal that some of the biggest moderate leaders were not averse to secretly giving monetary aid and blessings to the first groups of young terrorists![43]

[40] Haridas and Uma Mukherji, *Origins of the National Education Movement* (1957), pp. 37, 44.

[41] Cf. below, Chapters V. VII.

[42] Surendranath Banerji, *A Nation in Making* (1925), p. 228.

[43] Sukumar Mitra (Krishnakumar's son) recalls that his cousin Barindrakumar Ghosh visited Simultala, showed the first bomb to Surendranth and got his blessings for the projected assassination of Fuller in the summer of 1906 ("Sri Aurobindo Ackroyd Ghosh"—*Mashik Basumati*, Falgun 1358 (1952). Surendranath's version is that he successfully dissuaded the young men who informed him about the plan from proceeding further with it (*A Nation in Making*, pp. 217-18). Bhupendranath Dutta gratefully acknowledges the help the revolutionaries received from moderate leaders on many critical occasions (*op. cit*, p. 54); Hemchandra Kanungo more cynically declares that after the Barisal conference, many highly respectable moderate leaders sitting in their armchairs would have been delighted to hear that someone had managed to kill Fuller—and some of them were ready to offer money to purchase this pleasure (*Banglay biplab prachesta* (1928), p. 118). Perhaps a parallel may be found in the attitude of Miliukov, leader of the Russian constitutional-democrats, who attacked the social-democrats for their unduly harsh criticism of individual terror, and is said to have told the *Iskra* editors in 1902: "Why, let there be another two or three

Yet it would be unhistorical to ignore the other side of the picture. The bulk of the moderate leadership accepted the boycott weapon only after considerable hesitation. *Sanjibani's* call of 13 July 1905 got an immediate response from some mufassil meetings (notably Bagerhat in Khulna district on 16 July and Pabna on 23 July),[44] but the first editorial endorsement of the new tactics by Surendranth's *Bengalee* came only on 12 August. The editorials of 2 and 3 August had described the boycott resolutions being passed at some mufassil meetings as things which could "do no harm".[45] Even Motilal Ghosh's somewhat more radical *Amrita Bazar Patrika* busied itself throughout July 1905 almost entirely with refuting the arguments for the partition.[46] The boycott was endorsed only after long consultations held in the palace of Jyotindramohan Tagore and at the rooms of the Indian Association; we learn from Surendranth that some English friends of his were also consulted.[47] Narendranath Sen's speech moving the boycott resolution at the 7 August Town Hall meeting was extemely apologetic: "I sincerely wish that the occasion had not arisen at all to formally move such a resolution. . . I do not know whether and to what extent it will be effective. . .our object is not retaliation but vindication of our rights, our motto is 'Defence, not Defiance'. Let us hope, as we pray, that there is yet statesmanship left in England. . ."[48]

The moderates displayed still greater hesitation during the student movement for boycott of examinations and officialised schools and colleges; they managed to persuade the boys to call off this educational boycott—a decision which caused considerable discontent and produced the first real split

such attempts on the tsar's ministers and we are going to get a constitution." (Isaac Deutscher, *Trotsky: The Prophet Armed*, p. 69).

[44] *Bengalee*, 20 July, 26 July 1905.
[45] *Ibid*, "Partition and Protest", 3 August 1905.
[46] *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, editorials of 19, 21, 22, 24, 27 and 29 July 1905.
[47] *Ibid*, 21 July 1905; Surendranath Banerji, *op. cit.*, pp. 173-74, 178.
[48] P. Mukherji, *All About Partition* (September 1905), pp. 101-2.

between the old and the new trends.[49] In the end big colleges like Ripon or City controlled by prominent nationalist leaders somehow never got affiliated to the National Council of Education. An editorial in the *Bande Mataram* later roundly attributed this to the vested interests of men like Surendranath.[50] Radical calls for resignations from honorary government posts and a "boycott of administration" met with even less response, except for some such resignations immediately after the Barisal conference[51] and a boycott by most Hindu leaders of legislative council elections in the new province.

As the speech of Narendranath Sen clearly indicated, to most moderates the public opinion and electorate of Britain still appeared as ultimate arbiter of India's fate. The boycott was felt to be a last desperate effort to draw attention to the plight of Bengal through pulling at the purse-strings of British manufacturers and workers; that was to be its purpose, not primarily the encouragement of the spirit of selfreliance or the development of a movement of full-scale passive resistance as others were interpreting it. Hence the moderates felt no contradiction at all in going back repeatedly to the verbal appeals technique whenever the British attitude seemed to be softening slightly. Thus, immediately after the liberal electoral victory the *Sanjibani* called for a new all-Bengal meeting to send up a petition to Morley;[52] the *Bengalee* was thrilled by the polite reception given by Minto to an Indian Association deputation;[53] and the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* repeated all the old arguments against partition for the benefit of the new administration.[54] The history of the Bengal moderates between 1905 and 1908 reveals in fact a rather pathetic see-saw between hope and frustration. The

[49] Cf. below, Chapter IV.
[50] "The True Meaning of the Risley Circular", *Bande Mataram*, 28 May 1907.
[51] *Sanjibani*, 26 April 1906—RNP(B) for week ending 5 May 1906.
[52] *Ibid*, 28 December 1905—RNP(B) for week ending 6 January 1906.
[53] *Bengalee*, 14 January 1906.
[54] *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 20 and 21 February 1906.

early hopes aroused by Morley and reflected in the Town Hall meeting of 31 January 1906 were dashed by his 'settled fact' speech two months later; after the thrashing administered at the Barisal conference (April 1906) verbal violence held sway for some weeks; with Morley's budget speech and the resignation of Fuller, hopes rose again, and we hear of a new petition being organised after a leaders' meeting in Dacca;[55] the Calcutta Congress resolutions were 'explained' in a moderate way by leaders like Gokhale; and by March 1907, we find Surendranath "inveighing against the extravagances of Bepinchandra Pal" in a joint Hindu-Muslim deputation to the viceroy after the Comilla riots, as Minto exultantly reported.[56] Mendicancy had not ended, after all.

II. The Gospel of Atmasakti—Constructive Swadeshi

For at least a decade prior to the antipartition upsurge, forces critical of moderate attitudes and values had been gathering strength in Maharashtra, Punjab and Bengal. The starting-point of the new approach was a twofold critique of the Congress movement. The basic technique of appealing to British public opinion was condemned as 'mendicancy', futile in its effects and derogatory to national honour; the Congress itself was attacked for representing merely the English-educated elite alienated from the common people. Instead of prayers and petitions, selfreliance and constructive work became the new slogans—starting swadeshi enterprises and stores, trying to organise education on autonomous and indigenous lines, emphasising the need for concrete work at the village level. Such efforts at selfhelp, together with the use of the vernacular and utilisation of traditional popular customs and institutions (like the mela or fair), were felt to be the best methods for drawing the masses into the national movement. The emphasis on selfreliance became

[55] *Sanjibani*, 20 September 1906—RNP(B) for week ending 29 September 1906.
[56] Minto to Morley, 19 March 1907—Minto Papers, M1007.

identified increasingly with the revivalist approach to the Hindu religious tradition, the moderates were condemned as denationalised Anglicists, and an appeal to religious sentiment came to be regarded as the most effective technique for bridging the gulf between the educated and the common people, as well as an extremely useful morale-booster for political activists. Inspiration was sought from the writings of Dayananda in upper India and Bankimchandra and Vivekananda in Bengal, though the extremists perhaps distorted to some extent the original message in their quest for a purely political salvation.[57] The blending of nascent extremism with social revivalism, natural though it was, did not prove an unmixed blessing; it inevitably deepened Muslim alienation, while the genuinely orthodox Hindu was often not particularly impressed by the obviously political use being made of his religion.[58] The general trend away from moderate 'agitation', it must be added, broke up into two currents after 1905, when the partition created the scope for a broad political movement on novel lines. One, quieter and sometimes rather nonpolitical in its tone, emphasised patient efforts at selfdevelopment, ignoring foreign rule, rather than launching an immediate attack on it; the other, political extremism proper, tried to turn the boycott into a campaign of full-scale passive resistance, and set its sights on immediate independence rather than partial reforms or slow selfregeneration. In the sequel,

[57] For a detailed analysis of this point, see Amales Tripathi, *op. cit.*, Chapter I.

[58] Thus a contributor to the *Bharati* commented that the mantle of Tilak hardly suited the Anglicised youths running the *Bande Mataram* (Jitendranath Roy, *Bharati*, Pous 1313/1906). A critic of the Shivaji Utsava pointed out that the newfangled institution had met with little response from orthodox Hindus (Jogindranath Chakraborti in *Bangadarshan*, Aswin 1314 (1907). The *Bangabasi* and the *Swadeshi*, two journals noted for their social conservatism, strongly opposed political extremism. Within the Arya Samaj in Punjab, while the 'revisionist' college faction plunged into nationalist politics under Hans Raj and Lajpat Rai, the more orthodox 'Mahatma' group remained largely aloof (Lajpat Rai, *The Story of My Life*—in *Autobiographical Writings*, 1965, p. 56).

many representatives of the latter trend turned to terroristic methods.

Tilak in Maharashtra during the mid-'90s had blazed the trail for all later extremism with his Ganapati and Shivaji festivals, work among the peasants during the 1896 famine in what amounted to a no-rent campaign,[59] a boycott movement in embryo in protest against the new excise duty on Indian cottons,[60] and the agitation against the plague regulations in 1897 which culminated in the first act of revolutionary terrorism. In 1901, Lajpat Rai in two articles published in the *Kayastha Samachar* had advocated technical education and industrial selfhelp in place of the fatuous annual festival of English-educated Indians which went by the name of the Congress. The Arya Samajist leader went on to argue that the Congress should openly and boldly base itself on the Hindus alone, since unity with Muslims was a chimera.[61] Punjab was to influence Bengal more directly in 1905, in the person of Tahal Ram Ganga Ram, the Arya Samajist preacher whose College Square lectures calling for boycott and swadeshi created a sensation in Calcutta in the early months of that year.[62]

Eight years before Lajpat Rai, Aurobindo Ghosh in a famous series of eleven articles entitled "New Lamps for

[59] The Poona Sarvajanik Sabha volunteers urged the peasants to fight for the rent-remissions due to them under the famine code. That this move for mass contact had seriously worried the authorities is indicated by Denzil Ibbetson's letter to Curzon nine years later (6 August 1905)—"In Bombay alone, so far, in all India, has the political agitator attempted an agrarian agitation among the masses."—Curzon Collection, MSS Eur, F. 111/211 (Volume 32).

[60] Bipan Chandra, *op. cit.*, p. 130.

[61] "The Economic and Industrial Campaign in India, and the Coming Indian National Congress—Some Suggestions"—*Kayastha Samachar*, August, November 1901, cited in Argov, *op. cit.*, pp. 87-88.

[62] Tahal Ram was also the author of a 'national song'—in English—starting with the line "God bless our ancient Ind" which used to be sung in chorus in College Square in February-March 1905. Krishnakumar Mitra, *Atmacharit* (1937), pp. 245-46; Haridas and Uma Mukherji, *India's Fight for Freedom* (1958), p. 190.

Old"[63] (1893-94) had provided the classic criticism of the Congress, hammering on three main points. The English model of gradual constitutional progress admired by the moderates was shown to have serious limitations and to be inferior to the French experience dating from the days of "the great and terrible republic".[64] The Congress was attacked for its mendicant outlook ("a little too much talk about the blessings of British rule...").[65] Finally, and most important of all, striking a remarkably modern class-conscious tone, the young man newly returned from the West posed as the most vital of all problems the bridging of the gulf between "the burgess or the middle class" which the Congress represented[66] and the "proletariate... the real key of the situation".[67] "...the right and fruitful policy for the burgess, the only policy that has any chance of eventual success, is to base his cause upon an adroit management of the proletariate", Aurobindo declared.[68] The "proletariate" of Aurobindo, however, remains an undefined term, probably meaning nothing more specific than the common people of town and country in general; and the only way of reaching its heart is presumably religion. While "New Lamps for Old" is predominantly secular in tone except for a rather ominous reference to Muslims (who, it is said, are being "most assiduously soothed and flattered"[69] by the Congress), the succeeding articles on "Bankim Chandra Chatterji" reveal the England-returned young man breaking away decisively from his Anglicist upbringing. Aurobindo in Baroda must have been influenced by the stirring events in Maharashtra, and he developed early into a fullscale political extremist. By the late '90s, Aurobindo was already thinking in terms of secret preparations for an armed rising, and a few years afterwards he became a member of a Western Indian secret society

[63] *Indu Prakash*, 7 August 1893 to 6 March 1894. Nine of these articles have been reprinted in Haridas and Uma Mukherji's *Sri Aurobindo's Political Thought.*

[64] *Ibid*, article of 30 October 1893.

[65] *Ibid*, 7 August 1893.

[66] *Ibid*, 5 February 1894.

[67] *Ibid*, 6 March 1894.

[68] *Ibid*, 6 March 1894.

[69] *Ibid*, 28 August 1893.

headed by an Udaipur aristocrat.[70] The elaboration of the programme of passive or "defensive" resistance was to come later in the case of Aurobindo, when the antipartition upsurge for a time revealed the possibility of mass participation in the national struggle.[71]

In sharp contrast to the rather flamboyant personality of Aurobindo stands the figure of the quiet school-teacher of Barisal, Aswinikumar Dutta, who through a life-time of patient social work in his district built up a mass following unequalled by any other leader in Bengal. "The only person, who has a large and devoted following among the masses" as Pal described him in 1909,[72] Aswinikumar organised the students of his Brojomohan Vidyalaya into several volunteer bands on a permanent basis, sent up a petition to the Commons demanding elective legislatures with 40,000 signatures in 1887,[73] and converted Barisal into a real fort of the swadeshi movement after 1905, when the Swadesh Bandhab Samiti with its 159 branches penetrated deep into the interior of the district. Condemnation of the Congress as a 'three day's tamasha' by such a man (at the Amraoti session, 1897) could not but be effective. It was mentioned approvingly by Tagore almost immediately,[74] while Pal on the eve of the swadeshi upsurge pointed to the example of Barisal permanent student volunteer associations as worthy of emulation.[75] Deeply if somewhat eclectically religious; Aswinikumar considered himself to be a disciple of Keshabchandra, Bijoykrishna Goswami and Ramakrishna,[76] and his *Bhakti-Yoga* (1887)—a manual of practical religion—became very popular among Hindu householders.

[70] *Sri Aurobindo on Himself and on the Mother* (1953), pp. 14, 31, 38.
[71] Karan Singh, *Prophet of Indian Nationalism—Political Thought of Sri Aurobindo Ghosh, 1893-1910* (1963).
[72] Bepinchandra Pal, *Character-Sketches* (1909, 1957), p. 60.
[73] Saratkumar Roy, *Mahatma Aswinikumar* (1926), Chapters III, IV.
[74] "Prashanga-katha, 5"—*Bharati*, Agrahayan 1305 (1898) R.R.X, 575.
[75] "Amader volunteer-dal"—*Bhandar*, Jaistha 1312 (1905).
[76] Saratkumar Roy, *op. cit.*, Chapters VI, VII.

But it is from the writings of Rabindranath Tagore that we get the clearest—as well as of course the most memorable—evidence of the growth of a new spirit in Bengal. Strangely neglected by professional historians, placed by uncritical admirers on a timeless pedestal where change and inconsistency are out of bounds, Rabindranath's prose writings can be illuminating if studied in a chronological way. In the Tagore of the 1890s we find firstly numerous articles attacking government policies and the overall attitude of white arrogance which lay behind them, and which also expressed itself in cases of racial discrimination and ill-treatment of Indians.[77] The plea for selfreliance or atmasakti as opposed to the degrading mendicancy of Congress politicians dates back in Rabindranath to at least the mid-'80s (e.g. his song at the 1886 Congress: "Ask not for a song from me..." and some poems published in the *Manashi*),[78] but we find now a more definite call to turn away from conventional old-style politics in order to build up our own strength through constructive economic and educational work—swadeshi and national education.[79] A third important theme is the need to bridge the gulf between the educated and the masses—through the use of the mother-tongue as the medium of instruction and also in political meetings,[80] and by utilising traditional folk institutions like the mela. The latter suggestion was first made in the "Swadeshi Samaj" address of 1904;[81] it was discussed seve-

[77] "Mantri-abhishek" (1890) against Lord Cross's Bill—R.R., *Achalita*, II. "Ingraj o bharatbashi" (1893); "Apamaner pratikar" (1894); "Kantharodh" (1898) against the Sedition Bill; "Rajkutumba"; "Ghushaghushi" (1903)—R.R.X.

[78] "Amae bolo na gahite bolo na"; "Desher unnati" and "Bangabir" in *Manashi* (1888).

[79] "Ingraj o bharatbashi" (1893); "Prashanga-katha 5" (1898)—R.R.X. "Atyukti" (1902)—R.R. IV. "Bangabibhag" (1904)—R.R. III. "University Bill" (1904)—R.R.X.

[80] "Shikshar herpher" (1892)—R.R.XII. "Apar paksher katha" (1898)—R.R.X. Cf. also the memorable demonstration by the Tagores at the Natore Provincial Conference of 1897, demanding speeches in Bengali—Abanindranath Tagore and Rani Chanda, *Gharoa* (1941), pp. 8-9.

[81] "Swadeshi-samaj" (1904)—R.R. III.

ral times in the pages of Tagore's journal *Bhandar*,[82] and acted upon by many volunteer organisations during the swadeshi days.[83]

The contradictory pulls of modernist and traditionalist ideas are also vividly reflected in many of Rabindranath's essays. Here the balance is heavily tilted against Hindu revivalism down to 1898[84]—only in the overtly political lecture "The English and the Indians" (1893)[85] do we find a hint that the growing mood of exalting the Hindu past might have some positive aspects too. Then there is a significant silence for more than two years (from 1305 Agrahayan to 1308 Baisakh—1899 and 1900) when to judge from the *Rachanabali*, Rabindranath writes nothing at all on social or political subjects—we shall see that there is a similar silence during the latter half of 1906 and early 1907, and that both gaps denote important turning-points in the evolution of Rabindranath's thought. The intervening years 1901-6 are marked by the definite ascendancy of revivalist ideas in Rabindranath's mind—like a similar earlier period (1882-85), this obviously coincides with stormy political events. We are now informed about the essential distinctness of oriental civilisation and its superiority over the European;[86] the traditional samaj is hailed as the real centre of Indian life, not the state;[87] the Hindu past is invoked in poetic language;[88] child marriage and restrictions on widows are declared to be not unjustified in the

[82] *Bhandar*, Baisakh 1312 (1905), Agrahayan-Paus 1313 (1906).
[83] Cf. below, Chapter VI.
[84] "Hindu bibaha" (1887)—R.R. XII. "Nutan o puratan" (1891)—R.R. XI. "Prachya samaj" (1891), "Karmer umedar" (1892), "Adim sambal" (1892), "Acharer atyachar" (1892), "Samudra-jatra" (1893), "Bideshiya atithi o deshia atithya" (1894), "Ajogya bhakti" (1898)—R.R. XII.
[85] "Ingraj o bharatbashi" (1893)—R.R. X.
[86] "Samaj-bhed' (1901)—R.R.XI. "Birodhmulak adarsha" (1901)—R.R. X.
[87] "Prachya o pashchatya samaj" (1901)—R.R.IV. "Nation ki" (1901)—R.R. III.
[88] "Nababarsha" (1902)—R.R.IV.

context of Hindu society;[89] virtues are discovered in the functional specialisation through caste;[90] and even sati gets an honourable mention.[91] In "India's History" (1902),[92] unity in diversity is implied to be something already achieved in India in and through Hinduism. Rabindranath was to sharply modify this view in his post-1907 essays calling for patient work to build a 'mahajati' in our land.

By 1904 (the "Swadeshi Samaj" address at the Minerva and Curzon theatres, 7 and 18 Sravana 1311), Rabindranath's political ideas have attained the clarity of a programme. Turn away from old-style politics, trying in vain to placate the foreign ruler and talking big in a foreign tongue—he urges—let volunteers go to the villages instead, spreading social and political enlightenment in the melas and through magic-lantern lectures; and, above all, let us try to revive our traditional samaj, channelling all constructive work through it once again. The bond of unity with the country is being sought explicitly now through the Hindu religion and samaj—"Will not Hinduism be able to bring every one of us day by day into bonds of affinity and devotion to this Bharatvarsha of ours—the abode of our gods, the hermitage of our rishis, the land of our forefathers?"[93] To avoid dissensions, Tagore wants the appointment of a single leader or 'samajpati', and suggests the name of Gurudas Banerji—a man noted, by the way, for his social orthodoxy. He was to repeat this not very realistic plea in 1905 ("Situation and Remedy"[94]—two leaders are proposed here, a Hindu and a Muslim) and just after the Barisal conference in 1906 ("The Country's Leader"[95]—here he plumps, strangely enough, for Surendranath), revealing a certain fondness for a 'great man' theory of history which is surprising from so great a man. The "Swadeshi

89 "Samaj-bhed" (1901)—R.R. XI.
90 "Brahman" (1902)—R.R. IV.
91 "Mabhoi" (1902)—R.R.V.
92 "Bharatbarsher itihas" (1902)—R.R. IV.
93 "Swadeshi-samaj" (1904)—R.R. III, p. 538.
94 "Abastha o byabastha" (1905)—R.R. III.
95 "Deshanayak" (1906)—R.R. X.

Samaj" created a sensation with its combination of eloquence and practical suggestion, though there were a few critics even then who pointed out that Tagore was romanticising the traditional village samaj.[96] The Rabindranath of 1904 had obviously given little thought as yet to the problem of integrating the Muslims and the low-caste Hindus—always outside the pale of the traditional samaj—into the national movement.

Well before 1905, the spirit of selfhelp had started expressing itself through works. From the early '90s, numerous efforts were being made to promote swadeshi sales through exhibitions and shops—the latter often started by political leaders (Rabindranath's Swadeshi Bhandar in 1897, Jogeschandra Chaudhuri's Indian Stores in 1901, Sarala Debi's Laksmir Bhandar in 1903). The Bengal Chemicals had been started in 1893, and a company to exploit the Rajmahal kaolin deposits for the manufacture of porcelain floated in 1901.[97] The message of selfhelp in industry and education was being spread among the Calcutta student elite by Satischandra Mukherji through his journal *Dawn* (started in 1897) and his Dawn Society (1902-7).[98] The Bhagavat Chatuspathi (1895) connected with Satischandra Mukherji, the Dawn Society's weekly classes and seminars, the Saraswat Ayatan of Brahmobandhab Upadhyay (August 1902),[99] and Tagore's ashram near Bolpur (started in December 1901, with Upadhyay as the main adviser for the first few months)—mark the beginnings of a national education movement. The enthusiastic response to Jogendrachandra Ghosh's proposal (March 1904) for an association to raise funds for students going abroad for technical training was symptomatic of the new

[96] Prithwischandra Ray, "Swadeshi samaj—byadhi o chikitsya"—*Prabasi*, Sravana 1311 (1904); Pramathanath Raychaudhuri, "Kathabanam kaj"—*Prabasi*, Aswin 1312 (1905).

[97] For details, cf. below, Chapter III.

[98] Cf. below, Chapter VII.

[99] Haridas and Uma Mukherji, *Upadhyay brahmobandhab o bharatiya jatiyatabad* (1961).

atmosphere in Bengal.[100] Finally, the call for a break with the traditional type of agitation was raised from the presidential chair at the Burdwan Provincial Conference of June 1904. Asutosh Chaudhuri's dictum "A subject nation has no politics" and his plea for constructive selfhelp in place of mendicancy aroused a lot of interest,[101] and was welcomed by Tagore in his Swadeshi Samaj address.

From July 1905, reliance on selfhelp or atmasakti seemed to have become for a time the creed of the whole of Bengal. The air was full of swadeshi schemes—textile mills and improved handlooms, river transport concerns, match and soap factories, earthenware and tanneries—the *Prabasi* of Kartik 1313 (1906) gives what appears to be a fairly comprehensive list of the first fruits of this upsurge. National education was becoming a reality through mufassil schools, the Bengal National College and School (August 1906), and Taraknath Palit's Society for the Promotion of Technical Education. Some efforts were made to translate into practice Rabindranath's Swadeshi Samaj scheme—efforts with which even some of the young revolutionaries were associated for a brief while.[102] The Swadesh Bandhab Samiti of Barisal claimed to have settled 523 disputes through 89 arbitration committees by August 1906.[103] With pardonable exultation, Tagore remarked in Town Hall address of August 1905: "The country today accepts as eternal truths what only yesterday it did not even think worth listening to."[104] In retrospect, it is Rabindranath Tagore rather than the professional politicans who stands out as the most vivid and remarkable personality of those stirring 1905 days—participating in the rough-and-tumble of politics as never before and after, suggesting far-reaching schemes of autonomous rural develop-

[100] Cf. below, Chapter III.
[101] This was reflected, for instance, in the Unpublished Diary of Gyanchandra Banerji, entry of 29 October 1904.
[102] Bhupendranath Dutta, *op. cit.*, pp. 157-58.
[103] *First Annual Report of Swadesh Bandhab Samiti*, reprinted in *Bengalee*, 14 September 1906.
[104] "Abastha o byabastha" (1905)—R.R. III, p. 600.

ment on the model of Armenian nationalists in Russia,[105] bestowing with the vision of a poet a rare beauty and imaginative appeal to the whole movement through his rakhibandhan proposal, and composing at the same time a magnificent series of patriotic songs which will surely endure even if everything else about the swadeshi movement is forgotten.

Yet beneath the surface unity differences of approach and outlook remained, to express themselves once the first rapture was over. Moderate tendencies of a slideback towards old-style politics have been mentioned already; mere constructive swadeshism soon failed to satisfy also Pal, Upadhyay, Aurobindo and their followers, intent upon developing the boycott into a movement of fullscale passive resistance. Constructive swadeshi still had its adherents, however; keeping more or less aloof from political agitation whether of the old or new variety, men like Prafullachandra Roy, Nilratan Sircar, Ambicacharan Ukil and Biprodas Pal Chaudhuri concentrated their energies on industrial and commercial selfhelp, and a broadly similar outlook characterised the group around Satischandra Mukherji which constituted the hard core of the Bengal National College. Satischandra personally was a friend of Brahmobandhab and Aurobindo, but his journal concentrated mainly on constructive themes, and the sketch of basic principles published in the *Dawn* of March 1907 as a kind of swan-song for the Dawn Society emphasised selfhelp in industry, education, justice and rural life to the exclusion of a direct political clash with the foreign government.[106] The *Bande Mataram* of 3 May 1908 attacked the National Council of Education for its tendency to move away from politics.[107] Rabindranath had broken with the politicians even earlier, devoting himself after the summer of 1906 to village reconstruction efforts in

[105] *Ibid*, p. 616.

[106] Haridas and Uma Mukherji, *Origins of the National Education Movement* (1957), pp. 311-13.

[107] Editorial entitled "A Word in Time."

his central Bengal estates and educational experiments at Santiniketan.

The distinctive nature of the constructive swadeshi trend is best brought out by some interesting controversies of the period—debates which also throw a vivid light on the age as a whole.

The swing away from moderate politics and westernist ideology did not go unchallenged. Prithwischandra Ray and Pramathanath Roy Chaudhuri defended in 1904-5 the old style of politics against Rabindranath's criticism. "Work, certainly; but why not words, also? Why should we stop protesting against wrongs?... Words have been wasted often enough, we admit; but have they been entirely futile always? ... Is it not an empty dream to think merely about developing our institutions, ignoring external threats and allowing all official conspiracies to go on as before?"[108] Total rejection of the Congress is condemned—after all, it had been in existence for only some twenty years.[109] Ramananda Chatterji seems to agree, at least in 1904.[110]

More interesting is the attack on revivalism, which obviously had relevance to the entire movement of extremism, not solely or even mainly to constructive swadeshi of the Tagore brand. Pointing to the dark sides of life in the traditional village samaj—epidemics and famines, water-scarcity wherever good zamindars happened to be absent, caste-barriers and Brahmin domination—Prithwischandra Ray remarked bitterly: "It is enough to make one feel like dying of shame and sorrow to find a man like Rabibabu declaring that all opportunities for the cultivation of human qualities had been available to every villager under the traditional social organisation."[111] A more personal attack was that of Jyotischandra Mukhopadhyay in the *Nabyabharat*, dismissing the scheme

[108] Pramathanath Roy Chaudhuri, *op. cit.*
[109] Prithwischandra Ray, *op. cit.*
[110] Ramananda Chatterji, "Agami Congress", *Prabasi*, Paus 1311 (1904).
[111] Prithwischandra Ray, *op. cit.*

for unity through Hinduism as a mere "utopia",[112] critical even of Tagore's prose style, and making the rather nasty remark that the author of the "Swadeshi Samaj" had been intolerant of any criticism from his boyhood days.[113]

Even during the height of the swadeshi upsurge, dissident voices criticising its revivalist aspects were not entirely absent. "In the quest for contact with our country, we must not lose touch with our times", warned Pramathanath Chaudhuri, the future editor of *Sabuj Patra*, in the early months of 1906.[114] Benoyendranath Sen amplified this point, and eloquently defended the values of liberal free-thinking: "It seems to me that our present movement has a dark and empty side of which few are aware. The whole history of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries has a central theme—which is neither of the West, nor of the East, neither foreign nor swadeshi—but which is specific to the age. This is the concept of intellectual liberty... To fight shy of everything foreign is surely not a sign of patriotic strength and glory... if the insults of foreigners merely make us return to our own shells, that will not contribute to real selfrespect."[115] A few months later, we find the young writer Prabhatkumar Mukhopadhyay flaying swadeshi excesses, roundly declaring the much-quoted Ramayana sloka "Janani Janmabhumishcha Swargadapi Gariyasi" to refer to nothing more exalted than Ayodhya, and pleading for an open door for western ideas like republicanism, western techniques, and even western attire for greater convenience. "What should be our ideal? National progress? Or 'Swadeshi in everything'? If national progress is to be the objective, such swadeshism as retards that progress must be firmly rejected."[116] The article

[112] Jyotischandra Mukhopadhyay, "Swadeshi Samaj", *Nabyabharat*, Baisakh 1312 (1906).
[113] *Ibid.*
[114] Pramathanath Chaudhuri, "Tel, noon, lakri", *Bharati*, Magh/Phalgun 1312 (1906).
[115] Benoyendranath Sen, "Bartamanyuger swadhinchinta", *Bangadarshan*, Asar 1313 (1906).
[116] Prabhatkumar Mukhopadhyay, "Sarbabishay swadeshi", *Prabasi*, Kartik 1313 (1906).

provoked a violent rejoinder from Abanindranath Tagore.[117]

But the most memorable expression of this dissident modernist trend came from Sibnath Sastri, the distinguished leader of the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj—certainly no conventional milk-and-water moderate, but the man who had inspired Pal and a few others way back in the mid-'70s to take a remarkable pledge abjuring all government services, since foreign rule could have no moral or religious sanctity.[118] (It is interesting that Pal got this pledge printed in a leaflet and circulated it at the Star Theatre meeting of 3 August 1905.)[119] Sibnath Sastri struck a first note of warning in "Swadeshi 'Craze"—"Respect for the past is laudable, but not worship of the past."[120] In "National Unity",[121] he pointed (prophetically, one feels today) to the danger which newly-revived provincial, religious and caste sentiments could pose to the unity of India. Finally, in a brilliant article entitled "The Ills of Patriotism", Sibnath Sastri lashed out at the hatred of everything foreign, the uncritical defence of the present way of life, the undue glorification of the past—the whole attitude resembling that of a village mother defending her naughty son before critical neighbours—and he roundly declared: "The patriotism which glorifies our past as ideal and beyond improvement and which rejects the need for further progress is a disease."[122]

The debate, it must be added, was not a purely abstract one; it intruded on many practical issues, as for instance the problem of choice between handicrafts and factory industries in economic swadeshi,[123] or the composition of the

[117] Abanindranath Tagore, "Bijatiya rakamer swadeshunnati", *Prabasi*, Phalgun 1313 (1907).
[118] Bepinchandra Pal, *Nabayugar Bangla* (1955), pp. 122-24.
[119] *Daily Hitavadi*, 5 August 1905—RNP(B) for week ending 12 August 1905.
[120] Sibnath Sastri, "Swadeshi dhua", *Prabasi*, Asar 1312 (1905).
[121] Sibnath Sastri, "Jatiya ekata", *Prabasi*, Bhadra 1312 (1905).
[122] Sibnath Sastri, "Swadesh-premer byadhi"—*Prabasi*, Jaistha 1313 (1906).
[123] Cf. below, Chapter III.

National Council of Education, from which Brahmos like Krishnakumar Mitra and Sibnath Sastri were deliberately excluded.[124] The Anti-Circular Society guided by Krishnakumar kept away from the 1906 Shivaji Utsava, to which the extremists had imparted a blatantly Hindu tone by introducing an image of Bhavani.[125] Even among the revolutionaries, the memoirs of Bhupendranath Dutta and Hemchandra Kanungo indicate that there were a few who protested against the paraphernalia of Hindu vows and rites affected by the early secret societies.[126] The modernist-revivalist debate thus cut across the other divisions in the swadeshi movement.

From 1906 onwards, we can trace the development of a second controversy—between constructive swadeshi with its nonpolitical undertones and political extremism demanding an immediate and direct onslaught on foreign rule. Aurobindo in his articles on passive resistance[127] wanted the organisation of swadeshi enterprise, national schools and arbitration courts, but only as the positive supplement to the more important negative programme of multipoint and total boycott of foreign administration with the object of paralysing it. Mere "selfdevelopment", he argued, would not overthrow the bureaucracy, and without political freedom moral and social regeneration was quite impossible. In the second place, Rabindranath now came under attack from Pal, Upadhyay and Aurobindo for not being sufficiently enthusiastic over the amalgamation of politics with Hindu revivalism, and for his universalist leanings which were felt to have a demoralising effect.[128] Tagore in fact had drastically

[124] Cf. below, Chapter IV.
[125] Cf. below, Chapter VIII.
[126] Bhupendranath Dutta, *op. cit.*, pp. 45, 104. Hemchandra Kanungo, *Banglay biplab prachesta* (1928), pp. 242, 253-61. Cf. also below, Chapter IX.
[127] *Bande Mataram*, 9-23 April 1907, reprinted in Aurobindo, *Doctrine of Passive Resistance* (1948).
[128] Bepinchandra Pal, "Swadeshi ba patriotism, Nation ba jati", I, II. —*Bangadarshan*, Chaitra 1312, Asar/Sravana 1313 (1906); Brahmo-

reversed his stand on the ideological question by the middle of 1907. The change and the controversy it provoked took place in the background of the rise of political extremism and the spread of the communal virus during 1906-7, and it seems more convenient to study it after discussing the latter developments.

But it may be suggested here that constructive swadeshi if and when it got down from words to deeds perhaps had to abandon in practice much of the ideology of revivalism. Swadeshi enterprise required patient work and technical knowhow rather than religious enthusiasm. The small Bhagavat Chatuspathi could function on the orthodox Hindu model, but religious training took perforce a very minor place in the curriculum of the National College. The *Dawn* in its early years contained numerous articles on religious subjects; its later numbers concentrated mainly on the practical problems of swadeshi enterprise and national education.

Not many perhaps drew the necessary theoretical conclusions from these practical experiences, but it does not seem too farfetched to see this realisation reflected in the immortal pages of Rabindranath's *Gora* (1907-9). The young man whose burning patriotism had led him away from Brahmo sectarianism to seek contact with his motherland through the traditional religion realises in the depths of rural India the ugly reality of obscurantism stifling human initiative, setting apart caste from caste, Hindus from Muslims—"The ties of the samaj, the devotion to customs, do not give them any strength in practice. . .Gora realised that this samaj gives no help in times of need, no support in face of danger—it can only harass men by enforcing a rigid conformity. . . In the immobility of rural life Gora saw the real weakness of our country in an absolutely unadorned form. . . No longer could Gora delude himself with a

bandhab Upadhyay. "Swadeshbhakti o biswaprem" —*Swaraj*, 15 Baisakh 1314 (1907); Aurobindo, "The Morality of Boycott"—*op. cit.*, pp. 83-87.

romantic make-believe world of his own."[129] Is this Rabindranth's selfcriticism for Swadeshi Samaj, one wonders?

III. Political Extremism — The Passive Resistance Technique

Between 1905 and 1907, a third distinctive trend emerged in the political life of India, clearly demarcating itself by its objectives and techniques both from old-style moderatism and the newer creed of selfdevelopment alone. The new ideal was political independence—complete and unadulterated swaraj, and not piecemeal constitutional reform or slow selfregeneration; the method proposed was the extension of the boycott into a fullscale movement of non-cooperation, or, as the term then went, 'passive resistance'—and not appeals to British public opinion or mere concentration on industrial, educational and rural organisation. Some extremist leaders and many of their followers later turned to terrorism, and the rigid separation of violent from nonviolent methods was a later Gandhian importation. Yet it is necessary to clearly demarcate passive resistance as a logical trend from terrorism, since the first implied a bid to organise a mass movement, while the second came to rely almost entirely on the heroism of an elite. Both political extremism and the terrorism which succeeded it were generally characterised by a strong Hindu revivalist tone.

Freedom as the most worthy of ideals had occupied quite a prominent place in nineteenth century Bengali literature, Rangalal Bandopadhyay describing it in 1858 as that without which life itself loses meaning.[130] But both writers and politicians had tended to shift its locus to the lost days of Hindu glory or to a distant future; in the meantime British rule with its boons of unity, order and western education

[129] Rabindranath, *Gora*, R. R. VI, pp. 530-31.
[130] "Swadhinata-hinatay ke bnachite chay re..." —*Padmini-Upakshyan* (1858).

was indispensable—and so Surendranath felt no sense of anti-climax in the combination of passionate lectures on Mazzini and Garibaldi with pleas for more jobs in the ICS or more seats in the councils. By the turn of the century, the myth of the 'providential' British connection, still echoed dutifully at Congress sessions, was wearing rather thin. A munsiff of the provincial civil service recorded in his private diary on the eve of the 1905 upsurge : "to us loyalty is another name for hypocrisy, and such hypocrisy is a necessity of our existence".[131] For the young men rejecting such 'hypocrisy', conspiratorial organisations seemed to provide the only outlet prior to 1905, imparting physical training with the ultimate, somewhat vaguely-conceived aim of an armed struggle for freedom. Aurobindo had joined one such Western Indian group while at Baroda, and similar societies were being formed c. 1902 in Calcutta and Midnapur.[132]

1905 with its experience of mass involvement in politics brought the idea of freedom as a realisable immediate goal out into the public platform and press for the first time. In sharp opposition to Wedderburn, Cotton and Naoroji's British Committee of the Congress, Shyamaji Krishnavarma started in that year his campaign for Indian 'home rule' from London, with the help of British radicals and socialists like Hyndman. His journal *Indian Sociologist* in August 1906 called for "an absolutely free and independent form of national government", explicitly rejecting the alternative of colonial selfgovernment.[133] In Bengal, a little-known weekly the *Pratijna* edited by Jyotilal Mukherji, demanded "complete national selfgovernment" in its issue of 23 August 1905.[134] "Our ideal is freedom, which means absence of all foreign control", stated Bepinchandra Pal in September

[131] Unpublished Diary of Gyanchandra Banerji, entry dated 18 October 1904.
[132] Cf. below, Chapter IX.
[133] Indulal Yajnik, *Shyamaji Krishnavarma—Life and Times of an Indian Revolutionary* (1950), pp. 173-74.
[134] RNP(B) for week ending 2 September 1905.

1906,[135] and in his famous Madras lectures of the following May he pointed out the illogicality of the moderate demand for "selfgovernment under British paramountcy": "It would mean either no real selfgovernment for us or no real overlordship for England."[136] Aurobindo, while explaining "the true position of the party, misnamed extremists" (he preferred the term 'nationalist'), declared in April 1907: "The new movement is not primarily a protest against bad government—it is a protest against the continuance of British control; whether that control is used well or ill, justly or unjustly, is a minor and unessential consideration."[137] His enthusiasm led the future 'rishi' into near-Machiavellian language: "We recognise no political object of worship except the divinity in our Motherland, no present object of political endeavour except liberty, and no method or action as politically good or evil except as it truly helps or hinders our progress towards national emancipation."[138] It is noteworthy that partition had now become something quite secondary with Aurobindo, its abrogation the "pettiest and narrowest of all political objects"[139]—such is the advance made by the national movement in the short space of less than two years.

Yet it would be incorrect perhaps to overemphasise swaraj as the crucial differentia between moderates and extremists. Tilak, despite his statement in Calcutta—"I want to have the key of my house, and not merely one stranger turned out of it"—was essentially a pragmatist who would "take willingly half a loaf rather than no bread, though always with a full intention of getting the whole loaf in good

[135] "That Sinful Desire"—*New India*, 18 September 1906, reprinted in Pal, *Swadeshi and Swaraj* (1954), p. 63.

[136] "The Gospel of Swaraj"—*Ibid*, p. 162.

[137] "Nationalism, not Extremism"—*Bande Mataram*, 26 April 1907. reprinted in Haridas and Uma Mukherji, *Sri Aurobindo and the New Thought in Indian Politics* (1964), p. 17.

[138] *Doctrine of Passive Resistance*, pp. 67-68.

[139] *Ibid*, p. 21.

time".[140] At Surat he was eager for a compromise, and was even prepared to sign the moderate creed for tactical reasons.[141] About Lajpat Rai, Gokhale in a private letter expressed the view "that though his name is being freely used by Mr Pal and his party he is not with them in their views or methods"[142]—and in fact the Punjab leader did join the conventionists for a time after Surat. Bepinchandra performed a remarkable somersault in course of his stay in England after 1908, and while Aurobindo during 1907-8 had seemed the most militant advocate of swaraj, by February 1910 he was making tracks for Pondicherry.

Differences over methods were probably more fundamental,[143] and the really new extremist contribution was the technique of extended boycott. The *Indian Sociologist* was talking in terms of 'passive resistance' from October 1905, and in October 1907 Krishnavarma enunciated his "principle of dissociation"—boycott of schools, courts, services, also, interestingly enough, the organisation of strikes.[144] While the Bengal moderate leaders accepted the boycott after marked hesitation, they came under pressure almost immediately from a group of 'ultra-radicals', the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* of 19 August 1905 mentioning in this context S. K. Mullick, B. C. Pal, A. C. Banerji, P. Mitra, C. R. Das, J. N. Roy "and some other barristers". A series of meetings with Pal as the main speaker (Star Theatre, 3 August; Albert Hall, 5 August; Grand Theatre, 15 August)[145] urged the extension

[140] "Tenets of the New Party" (Calcutta, 2 January 1907)—Tilak, *Writings and Speeches* (n. d), pp. 49, xxiv.

[141] *Sri Aurobindo on Himself and on the Mother* (1953), p. 80. Aurobindo claims the credit for having dissuaded Tilak, and takes upon himself the full responsibility for the split— "... it was I (without consulting Tilak) who gave the order that led to the breaking of the Congress...", *Ibid*, pp. 81-82.

[142] Gokhale to Natesan, 2 October 1906—Gokhale Papers, Reel No. 4.

[143] As Debkumar Raychaudhuri pointed out in "Dui rajnaitik dal", *Prabasi*, Chaitra 1314 (1908).

[144] Indulal Yajnik, *op. cit.*, pp. 146-47, 232-33.

[145] *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 4 August, 7 August, 16 August 1905. Surendranath's *Bengalee* entirely blacked out these meetings.

of the boycott technique to cover titles, government services and education. Two hundred students at the Star Theatre meeting responded to Pal's call to sign a pledge to abstain from government service.[146] The *Sandhya* denounced the Town Hall meeting of 7 August 1905 for its "Slavishness in Protest" in once again sending up a memorial to the secretary of state,[147] and the *Pratijna* of 23 August 1905 called for adoption of methods of "passive resistance".[148] The radical protest against the established moderate leadership, at first focused on minor issues like the use of foreign draperies to decorate the Town Hall on 7 August[149] or the compromising of the Carrol case in October 1905,[150] gathered

[146] *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 29 August 1905.

[147] *Sandhya*, 9 August, 14 August 1905—RNP(B) for Weeks ending 12 August and 19 August 1905.

[148] RNP(B) for week ending 2 September 1905.

[149] At the Albert Hall meeting of 5 August 1905, Aswinicoomar Banerji accused Surendranath Banerji and Jogeshchandra Chaudhuri of having ordered draperies from Hall and Anderson. The manager of the *Bengalee* denied the charge, but later had to eat his words. A detailed account of the incident is given in a letter dated 10 August 1905 by Sachindraprasad Basu, which is preserved in the Private Papers of A. C. Banerji.

[150] A number of students had been arrested on 3 October 1905 following a clash with the police on Harrison Road in which Inspector Carrol had been injured. The moderate leaders hastily arranged a compromise by which the case was withdrawn in return for a guarantee of good behaviour and a compensation of Rs 100 for the inspector. A furious Motilal Ghosh condemned this action of Surendranath Banerji and Bhupendranath Bose in a letter to A. C. Banerji dated 5 October : "Our face has been blackened with 'chun' and 'kali'" (lime and ink). That it was also a serious political mistake from the nationalist point of view is shown by the following frank account of the incident given by Fraser to Curzon on 8 October 1905: "We could not have procured a conviction, for the complainant refused to come forward, and witnesses concealed themselves. But we did not let this be known. So the leaders of the agitation in Calcutta came in great alarm and begged for the boys' release. We agreed, provided that they guaranteed that there should be no more of this, and that the matter should be dealt with by the institutions. They have thus given themselves into our hands; and we are in a far stronger position, for future action through the education department." Curzon Collection, MSS Eur, F. 111/211 (Volume 32).

strength following the withdrawal of the educational boycott movement. Placards appeared on Calcutta streets denouncing the return to mendicant methods at the Town Hall meeting of 31 January 1906,[151] the Swadeshi Mandali formed at a conference at C. R. Das' on 24 December 1905 organised the Shivaji Utsava of June 1906 on extremist lines (with religious trappings and Tilak as chief guest),[152] and Surendranath's leadership was openly challenged at the meeting of 10 July 1906 to set up the reception committee for the coming Congress.[153] The ideas of the new party were at first expressed through Upadhyay's *Sandhya* and Pal's *New India;* in August 1906 the considerable journalistic talents of the radicals were pooled under Aurobindo's guidance and with Subodhchandra Mullick's financial backing to launch the famous English daily *Bande Mataram.*

The theory of passive resistance acquired its finished form mainly through the writings of Bepinchandra and Aurobindo during 1906-7. "Our method is passive resistance, which means an organised determination to refuse to render any voluntary and honorary service to the government", declared Pal in September 1906,[154] and he passionately urged his Madras audiences to break the 'maya' of British rule by

[151] The placards stated : "Swadeshi pratijna bhulia/aj abar/firinghee darbare bhikshar janya/Town Hall-e jaoa/kartabya nahe"—Unpublished Diary of Hemendraprasad Ghosh, entry dated 31 January 1906.

[152] Hemendraprasad Ghosh, *Congress* (1921), pp. 126-27 and Chapter VI.

[153] At this meeting, held with Motilal Ghosh in the chair, Surendranath was supported by Bhupendranath Bose, J. Chaudhuri, A. Chaudhuri, J. Ghosal, Dr Prankrishna Acharyya, Dr Nilratan Sircar, P. Chaudhuri, Kaliprasanna Kabyabisharod and A. H. Guznavi; Pal got the backing of C.R. Das, A.C. Banerji, J.N. Roy, J.N. Ghosh, Gispati Raychaudhuri, Panchkouri Banerji, S. N. Haldar and S. R. Das. The climax came when C. R. Das declared "that Surendra Babu should no longer consider that the Congress was his personal property"—after which "the meeting broke up in disorder". Bengal Police Abstract No. 29, 21 July 1906—Abstract of Reports from Bengal, July 1906, Enclosure J. Home Public Progs Deposit, September 106, n. 5.

[154] *New India,* 18 September 1906—*op. cit.*

refusing to staff its machinery of government.[155] The *Sandhya* of 21 November 1906 visualised a peaceful liberation of the country through noncooperation on a massive scale— "...if...the chaukidar, the constable, the deputy and the munsiff and the clerk, not to speak of the sepoy, all resign their respective functions, feringhee rule in the country may come to an end in a moment. No powder and shot will be needed, no sepoys will have to be trained..."[156] But the classic statement of course came from Aurobindo in April 1907[157]—clearly demarcating "passive resistance" from "petitioning", "selfdevelopment and self-help" and also from "aggressive resistance" or "armed revolt";[158] explaining the term to imply "an organised and relentless boycott" of British goods, officialised education, justice and executive administration backed up by the positive development of alternatives in the forms of swadeshi, national education, arbitration courts and leagues of mutual defence;[159] enunciating also a programme of civil disobedience of unjust punitive laws and enforcing passive resistance through the machinery of a "social boycott" of traitors;[160] and keeping a door ajar for violent methods in case the British step up repression beyond a certain point.[161] The whole future political programme of Gandhism is virtually sketched out for us here, save for the dogma of nonviolence.

Such techniques obviously required for their success a very high degree of mass participation. The achievements of the Calcutta extremist leaders in this respect were much less than they might have been. A disproportionate part of their energies seems to have been spent in the infighting over the Congress organisation; they suffered from an ex-

155 *Swadeshi and Swaraj*, pp. 119-271
156 RNP(B) for week ending 1 December 1906.
157 *Bande Mataram*, 9-23 April 1907—reprinted as *Doctrine of Passive Resistance* (1948).
158 *Ibid*, I. IV. VI.
159 *Ibid*, IV ("Its Methods").
160 *Ibid*, V ("Its Obligations").
161 *Ibid*, VI ("Its limits").

aggerated estimate of the value of fiery editorials and speeches;[162] and they failed also to build up a single coherent alternative leadership. Pal at first was the chief public spokesman of the Bengal extremists, and he certainly saw himself as Surendranath's successor; but he was felt to be somewhat mercurial, had little organisational talent,[163] and was not much respected personally.[164] The barrister-leaders were young and not yet very well known, and their way of life might have been an additional handicap. The hard core of Bengal extremism was constituted by the group round Aurobindo and the *Bande Mataram*, and included Shyamsundar Chakrabarti, Monoranjan Guha Thakurta, Subodhchandra Mullick, Bejoychandra Chatterji, Dr Sundarimohan Das and Hemendraprasad Ghosh. Aurobindo during the winter and spring of 1907-8 seemed on the point of emerging as an all-India leader of the extremists, but along with many of his associates he had already become deeply involved in the revolutionary conspiracy—and his attempt to

[162] Bhupendranath Dutta has given a harsh estimate of the leaders of Bengal extremism—*op. cit.*, p. 53.

[163] Thus it is significant that Bepinchandra seems to have made little effort to establish contacts with the samiti or volunteer movement which was the greatest organisational achievement of the swadeshi age. His inability to get on even with men of similar ideas was shown by his exclusion from the management of the *Bande Mataram* within two months of its foundation.

[164] Gokhale in a letter to Natesan (2 October 1906) already cited had some praise to spare for Lajpat and even his personal rival Tilak, but described Pal as "a very unscrupulous man and inordinately ambitious... He uses brave words, but behind these words there is neither courage nor character and of course there is no judgement, and I have little doubt that in a year or two we shall see this man's collapse, whatever noise he may succeed in making temporarily." "He has always been described to me as a very timid person", stated Risley on 21 May 1907 (Home Public Progs A, June 1907, n. 117-18). Aurobindo later on described Bepinchandra as "perhaps the best and most original political thinker in the country, an excellent writer and a magnificent orator", but added that he was "not a man of action or capable of political leadership". (*Sri Aurobindo on Himself and on the Mother*, p. 52.)

ride two horses at the same time ultimately proved disastrous for both.[165] Outside Calcutta, the district conferences of 1907-8 revealed that the bulk of the established mufassil leaders had either remained loyal to their old ties with Surendranath, or (like Aswinikumar Dutta) preferred to stay nonaligned in the metropolitan quarrel.[166]

The ideal of mass struggle against foreign rule acquired some substance, however, from two very important developments for which the Calcutta extremist leaders were only partly responsible. The "rings" of lawyers which, in Pal's language,[167] had monopolised politics so far in district towns were breaking down, as the movement threw up a new organisational form—the samitis, sometimes described in official reports as bands of 'national volunteers'. Later nationalist accounts tend to describe this development almost wholly in terms of incipient terrorism, the entire samiti movement being regarded as a kind of precursor for revolutionary activity. Contemporary sources, however, provide ample evidence that down to the banning of the five principal samitis in January 1909, the movement had been much more broadbased, multifarious and more-or-less open. While ginger groups planning secret violence may have existed within many of the samitis from an early date, till the latter half of 1908 these organisations were engaged mainly in many other types of activities—physical and moral training of members; social work during famines, epidemics and religious festivals (which sometimes won grudging praise even from official quarters);[168] propagating the swadeshi

[165] Extremism as a public movement was shattered by the repression unleashed as the inevitable result of the Maniktala adventure, while—as Hemchandra Kanungo pointed out (*op. cit.*, p. 255)—Aurobindo's public activities probably helped to expose the revolutionary underground.

[166] Cf. below, Chapter VIII.

[167] "The Shell and the Seed", *Bande Mataram*, 17 September 1906.

[168] Thus the *Administration of Bengal under Andrew Fraser (1903-1908)*, pp. 15-16, mentions volunteer work at the Ardhodaya Yoga of February 1908.

message through magic-lantern lectures, patriotic songs and jatras; organising swadeshi crafts, schools, arbitration courts and 'palli samajes'; and implementing passive resistance through a social boycott of recalcitrants. Official sources emphasise a link with bhadralok occupying intermediate positions in the vast permanent settlement hierarchy—thus statistics from six Bakargunj (Barisal) thanas show that contrary to the popular impression, only 295 out of 1683 volunteers were students or ex-students, while "in Sarupkhati nearly half the volunteers are said to be talukdars, that is to say, persons with a tenure-holding interest in the land".[169] The samitis attained their greatest strength in areas like Barisal or the Madaripur subdivision of Faridpur, where a high level of English education coincided with economic distress among tenure-holders, whose inelastic incomes were being eroded by the rise in prices and the narrowing down of white-collar employment opportunities.[170] Police files urging the deportation of Aswinikumar Dutta[171] bear witness to the alarm caused in official circles by the Swadesh Bandhab Samiti's efforts to woo the predominantly Muslim peasantry of Barisal.[172]

A second notable development, strangely neglected by historians so far, was industrial unrest in Calcutta, its environs, and railway centres like Jamalpore, Asansol and Kharagpur. Described in an official survey as "a marked feature of the quinquennium"[173] (1903-8), the strikes were no doubt primarily caused by material grievances like rising prices, conditions of work and pay and ill-treatment by white officials; but labour discontent was being given some amount of politi-

[169] "Memorandum on the National Volunteer Movement in Bengal and Eastern Bengal and Assam"—Home Political Progs Deposit, October 1907, n. 19.
[170] *Bengal District Administration Committee Report* (1915), pp. 164-71.
[171] Home Political Progs A, August 1907, n. 106. Home Political Progs Deposit, November 1909, n. 6.
[172] For a detailed account of the samiti movement, cf. below, Chapter VII.
[173] *Administration of Bengal under Andrew Fraser (1903-1908)*, p. 24.

cal direction for the first time by a group of nationalist leaders—among whom four stand out, Aswinicoomar Banerji, Prabhatkusum Roychaudhuri, Apurbakumar Ghosh and Premtosh Bose. Unions were organised for press employees, jute workers and railwaymen, nationalist interest in labour unrest in foreign-managed concerns reaching a climax with the two-month-long East Indian Railway strike of July-September 1906.[174]

Moderate leaders were not infrequently associated with the samitis—Krishnakumar Mitra and Ambicacharan Majumdar for example were much more prominent in this respect than Pal or Aurobindo—and two out of the four labour leaders mentioned above became in the end allies of Surendranth.[175] Yet the extremists often claimed and obtained even from their enemies the bulk of the credit for these developments, since objectively the strikes and samitis fitted in much more appropriately with the creed of passive resistance. A *Bande Mataram* editorial entitled "Why this Cry for Freedom" (7 September 1907) mentioned "the national education, the organisation of volunteers, the labour strikes" as unexpected developments proving the divine nature of the movement.[176] A moderate critic referred to "the formation of trade unions and the promotion of strikes" as part of the extremist technique, and condemned such methods as premature—"that day is not yet".[177] The *Bande Mataram* printed news of Western labour and social-democratic movements, and published socialist songs—one ending with the refrain "By the Red Flag of freedom we swear".[178]

A hostile contemporary described extremism as a strange combination of the "darkest superstitions of Hinduism

[174] For details, cf. below, Chapter V.

[175] Aswinicoomar Banerji and Prabhatkusum Roychaudhuri.

[176] Cf. also two other *Bande Mataram* editorials: "Our Programme" (20 June 1907) and "Liberty and Our Social Laws" (17 September 1907).

[177] C. Y. Chintamani, "Extremist Politics"—*Modern Review*, April 1907.

[178] *Bande Mataram*, 23 September 1907.

and...extreme ideas of Western democracy".[179] That the judgement, though couched in obviously pejorative terms, was not entirely unfair is indicated by the *Bande Mataram* editorial entitled "Liberty and Our Social Laws" (17 September 1907) which after hailing the labour movement went on to praise the caste system in its ideal form for having "had the true socialistic aim of keeping awake in every class of the society a sense of duty to it". Shorn of its abuses, caste could serve as the basis for a purified democracy and socialism—"Socialism is not an European idea, it is essentially Asiatic and especially Indian."[180] Orthodox Hinduism in the swadeshi age served in fact the dual purpose of morale-booster for the activists and principal agency of mass contact, and we hear numerous instances of collective vows in temples to abjure bideshi goods (e.g. the Kalighat rally on Mahalaya day, 28 September 1905, said to have been attended by 50,000),[181] condemnations of foreign articles by pundits, leaflets alleging impurities in foreign sugar and salt, and, most effective of all, the social ostracism of those sticking to bideshi (the best-documented example of this concerning the Shaha merchants of Barisal).[182] Religious, upper-caste influence often got merged with zamindari and general bhadralok pressure on the lower orders, of which the most common form was the attempt by naibs to forcibly exclude bideshi goods from village marts. Quite a few zamindari officials were brought to trial on charges of forcible interference with vendors selling foreign articles, and the large number of Muslim plaintiffs in such cases is significant—and ominous.[183]

If nationalism was to put on a distinctively Hindu garb, what about the other communities, particularly the Muslim? Bepinchandra Pal—despite his Brahmo background, one of

[179] V. Chirol, *Indian Unrest* (1910)—Lyall's Introduction, p. xi.
[180] "Caste and Democracy"—*Bande Mataram*, 21 September 1907.
[181] *Bengalee*, 29 September 1905.
[182] Home Political Progs Deposit, May 1909, n. 15.
[183] For details regarding the use of religion, social boycott and zamindari pressure, cf. below, Chapter VI.

the stoutest advocates of giving to politics an orthodox Hindu colour—suggested in many of his writings a "federal" solution. His ideal was a "composite nationalism" in which Hindus, Muslims, Christians and others would retain and develop their characteristic traditions and customs and yet unite freely to form a broader and richer whole.[184] A lofty ideal, no doubt, but it is important to note that the communities which were to form the units in the federation were conceived on traditional religious lines (and not in terms of the modern idea of linguistic nationalities with a territorial basis)—from which the later theory of Muslim separatism and Pakistan is just one more step. Pal expressly rejected the alternative ideal of union on a secular basis. Defending the introduction of image-worship in the 1906 Shivaji Utsava, he categorically declared: "Some people want to confine the national life of modern India to merely political or economic matters... But to separate national life from religion would mean the abandonment of religious and moral ideas in personal life also."[185] Patriotism, according to Bepinchandra, must be based on a consciousness of the excellence and even superiority of one's own country, religion and culture over those of other peoples—and so he sharply criticised universalist talk about humanity in general in what was probably a hit at Rabindranath.[186]

IV. The Shift to Terrorism

The techniques of passive resistance got only a very brief trial in Bengal, and by the middle of 1908 the atmosphere had definitely changed. In place of an open and relatively mass movement we have on the one hand a return to 'mendicant' ways, and on the other secret societies of heroic and desperate young men raising the curtain on an epic saga

[184] Pal, "Speech at Shivaji Festival" (1903); "Composite Patriotism—the Nationalist View" (*New India*, 27 May 1905). Reprinted in *Swadeshi and Swaraj*, pp. 85-87, 9-11.

[185] "Shivaji Utsava", *Bangadarshan*, Bhadra-Aswin 1313 (1906).

[186] "Nation ba jati II", *Bangadarshan*, Sravana 1313 (1906).

which was to go on for at least thirty years. My use of the term 'terrorism' will probably cause some surprise; the participants in the movement would no doubt have preferred descriptions like 'revolutionary' or 'militant nationalist' as more in keeping with their subjective inclinations.[187] But the trouble about the latter terms is that they fail to specify with sufficient precision the exact nature of 'revolutionary' or 'militant' nationalism. What the Indian freedom movement saw was not armed uprisings of the plebeian masses of cities on the model of Paris or Petrograd, nor the Chinese way of long-drawn-out peasant-based guerilla actions creating 'liberated areas' in the countryside; but assassinations of oppressive officials, spies and traitors, 'swadeshi dacoities' to raise funds, and occasional more grandiose plans for armed coups based on infiltration into the Indian army and assistance from Germany or Japan. The historically-important distinction, I suggest, is not the use of violence, but mass action as contrasted to elite action.

Terrorism remains today—and rightly no doubt—a glorious memory in Bengal; so much so that few seem to have seriously attempted to explain why the shift to methods of individual violence occurred in the first place, and why the striking anticipations of Gandhian technique in Pal and Aurobindo bore relatively so little fruit in action during Bengal's swadeshi age. The usual explanation—in terms of police repression alone—will not really suffice. It is true that picketers were continually harassed and whole regions (like Barisal) occasionally terrorised by punitive police, that meetings were banned and the radical press eventually gagged, and that several leaders were jailed or deported and some of the samitis proscribed. Yet, to keep a sense of proportion, we should remember that a parliamentary report in 1909 listed only 10 cases in Bengal and 105 in Eastern Bengal and Assam where prosecutions had been actually instituted during the

[187] The absurdity of the occasional use of the term 'anarchist' in official records to describe the Indian nationalist revolutionaries is of course obvious; their ideal was an independent Indian state, certainly not a stateless society.

preceding four years; only about half of these were successful, the accused getting terms varying from a year to two weeks.[188] At least in the early days of the boycott agitation, there was a strong element of the ridiculous in the constant complaints about police 'barbarities' and talk of Bengali 'martyrs'; it is difficult to keep a straight face for instance while reading the *Bengalee*'s account of the insult offered to Surendranath by the Barisal magistrate: "Think of our leader, our heroic and heaven-sent leader . . . think of him as he stood there like Christ standing before Pilate."[189] An Irish patriot residing in India in a letter to the *Bengalee* a few days later expressed his sympathy for the "forward party" here, but bluntly declared: "Talk of Bengali martyrs is sickening. The word was never meant to be used for such petty pinpricks."[190] While many avenues of open agitation had no doubt been blocked by 1908, it is surely interesting that Aurobindo's suggestion in 1907 of a mass courting of arrest through violation of unjust laws[191] never seems to have been tried out—a comparison with the later successful Gandhian technique of flooding the prisons with volunteers is irresistible. In 1909, Aurobindo himself drew a very unflattering contrast between conditions in India and the success of Gandhi's movement in the Transvaal. In Bengal we have only talked about passive resistance,

[188] R. C. Majumdar, *History of the Freedom Movement in India*, Volume II. (1963), p. 49.

[189] "The Barisal Barbarities"—editorial in *Bengalee*, 18 April 1906.

[190] The letter, signed by Kilmainham (member of the United Irish League), concluded with the hope: "Hasten the day when the people of India can look back on a glorious record of suffering...when...they can sing a translation of the Irish song which men have sung on the threshold of the scaffold—

God save Ireland, cried the heroes,
God save Ireland ! cried they all.
Whether on the scaffold high,
Or on the battlefield we die,
Oh, what matter when for Erin dear we fall.

"Bande Mataram"—*Bengalee*, 28 April 1906. Bengal of course was to produce such heroes in abundance in a short while, but as of 1906, the rebuke was justified.

[191] Aurobindo, *Doctrine of Passive Resistance*, V.

he declared, whereas it has been made into a reality under far more difficult conditions in South Africa. Yet three hundred million Indians could have brought down the whole apparatus of foreign rule in ten days of passive resistance, and even the participation of ten million, Aurobindo felt, would have been sufficient to bring about a peaceful revolution in the course of one year.[192]

As the following chapters will try to indicate, the swadeshi movement in all its multifarious aspects—boycott and industrial revival, national education, trade unions, samiti organisation—was brought to a halt primarily by internal weaknesses, and particularly by the failure to close the age-old gap between the bhadralok and the masses. The real Achilles' heel of the movement was its lack of a peasant programme, its inability to mobilise the peasants on issues and through idioms which could have had a direct appeal for them—once again the contrast with Gandhism is illuminating. Tilak in 1896 had campaigned for remission of revenue in famine-stricken districts, but he stoutly opposed official moves to restrict moneylending activities and reduce khoti (petty landlord) rights in the Konkan : "Just as the government has no right to rob the sowkar (moneylender) and distribute his wealth among the poor, in the same way the government has no right to deprive the khot of his rightful income and distribute the money to the peasant. This is a question of rights and not of humanity."[193] Aurobindo in his 1907 articles on passive resistance expressly ruled out a no-tax campaign on Irish lines, as this might eventually hurt the presumably patriotic landlord class of Bengal.[194] This hesitation was only to be expected in a movement deriving its main social support from bhadraloks having usually at least one foot in the soil in the form of tenure-holdings. But it meant—as Rabindranath commented drily in 1907[195]—that

[192] *Dharma*, No. 14, 20 Agrahayan 1316 (1909).
[193] Quoted in G. P. Pradhan and A. K. Bhagwat, *Lokmanya Tilak* (1958), p. 134.
[194] Aurobindo, *op. cit.*, p. 43.
[195] "Byadhi o pratikar"—R.R. X, p. 630.

the peasants were expected to buy inferior and costly goods and face Gurkha lathis into the bargain for the sake of a cause that must have seemed rather distant and abstract to them, and that they were being asked to do all this by 'babus' who had treated them so long with contemptuous indifference or at best with condescension. Peasant apathy could not be broken by eloquent speeches, articles, and songs on brotherhood and common devotion to the motherland, however sincere—in December 1906, Debiprasanna Roychaudhuri after a long tour of mufassil districts admitted that more than nine-tenths of the lower orders were utterly indifferent to swadeshi.[196]

The second, related failure was of course in the region of Hindu-Muslim relations, where as elsewhere the swadeshi pattern was one of earnest efforts, initial successes and ultimate frustration. There were many heart-warming scenes of unity, particularly in the early days, and the movement threw up a considerable number of Muslim swadeshi leaders, every bit as patriotic and sincere as their Hindu counterparts, who deserve to be remembered far more than they usually are—among them might be mentioned Abul Kasem, Guznavi, Rasul, Abul Husain, Din Mohamed, Dedar Bux, Liakat Husain, Abdul Gafur and Ismail Husain Shiraji.[197] But meanwhile Muslim separatism was gathering strength, and that on two levels. Attention has usually been concentrated on the activities of the group of Muslim gentry around Nawab Salimulla of Dacca, or on the men who got together the Simla deputation. By itself this might have remained just a stirring within the upper crust; what appears much more significant and ominous is the response the separatist propaganda of mullas was getting from the Muslim peasants of districts like Mymensingh—as is borne out by the complaints of the local nationalist weekly *Charu Mihir* from January 1906 onwards. The first riots broke out at Iswargunj in May 1906, followed next year by more serious disturbances at

[196] "Bande Mataram mantra, democracy a daridrasamashya"—*Nabyabharat*, Paus 1313 (1906).
[197] Cf. below, Chapter VIII.

Comilla (March 1907) and at Jamalpur and the Dewangunj-Bakshigunj region of Mymensingh (April-May 1907).

The riots immediately started a flood of argument on the question of responsibility. British officials and communal-minded Muslim leaders blamed the swadeshi agitators and zamindars for allegedly trying to force costly indigenous articles on Muslim peasants; nationalists indignantly flung back the charge, accusing the rulers of having fomented the riots through their divide-and-rule techniques and tacit encouragement of mulla propaganda. The latter had a good case so far as the question of immediate responsibility was concerned. Some recently-appointed Muslim local officials had shown blatant partiality, the Calcutta High Court struck down several judgements of lower courts in riot cases for being biased against Hindus,[198] and it could hardly have been an accident that Ibrahim Khan, the author of the communal *Red Pamphlet*, was let off with a warning, while Liakat Husain and Abdul Gafur were being hounded down for sedition. But the point of course is how and why the separatist message got across to the Muslim peasants at a time when the earnest and sincere efforts of swadeshi agitators (also often using the medium of religion) were failing to move their Hindu counterparts in any sustained manner. The greater cohesion and fanaticism of the Muslim community perhaps supplies part of the answer. But the more important explanation lies in facts of social structure, creating a kind of built-in advantage for Muslim separatists, who could safely indulge in considerable antilandlord and antimahajan demagogy directed against the predominantly Hindu land-based bhadralok community of East Bengal. Official reports, Muslim newspaper accounts, and, most convincing of all, nationalist Hindu sources—all testify to the fundamentally agrarian character of the

[198] The most well-known instance being the Comilla riot case of 1907, in which a Hindu constable out of uniform had fired on Muslim rioters and killed one of them. He was convicted on a murder charge, but the High Court eventually accepted his selfdefence plea. For an account of this and a number of similar cases, see C. J. O'Donnell, *The Causes of the Present Discontents in India* (1908), Chapter VIII.

Mymensingh riots.[199] A letter from a village named Shohagdal published in the *Barisal Hitaishi* of 1 July 1906[200] describes the activities of a Muslim deputy magistrate who had been allegedly encouraging the peasants to stop payment of bhet, salami and nazar to their Hindu landlords. The Muslims reportedly asked—"What if the landlords summon us to their kutchery and beat us with shoes in case we don't pay nazar?" The story is surely revealing in more ways than one. After the 1907 riots, a rather naive letter printed in the *Bande Mataram* of 17 May 1907 described the Hindu-Muslim struggle as between "the ignorant multitude and the educated few... the low class Mohomedans represent manual labour and the Hindus with a sprinkling of higher class Mohomedans represent capital". The comparison is not very pleasant—but so must the Polish or Magyar nationalist gentry have blamed their Slav tenants after the 1848 debacle.

The nationalist movement as a whole failed to develop an adequate response to the challenge posed by Hindu-Muslim riots. The moderates made sporadic attempts at unity from the top—as in the joint deputation to Minto (15 March 1907) after the Comilla riots consisting of the Maharaja of Darbhanga, Surendranath Banerji, Narendranath Sen, Asutosh Chaudhuri, Abdul Rasul, Amir Husain and Shamsul Huda[201]—essentially superficial attempts, like many similar later bids, in that the deeper social roots of the problem were ignored. But the moderates at least were making sincere efforts to achieve amity; the extremists—carried away by emotion and seeing in the Muslim rioters only hired goondas of the British—were meanwhile doing their best to make things worse. The *Bande Mataram* of 1 May 1907 came out with a huge photograph of the desecrated Jamalpur image;

[199] As instances may be cited R. Nathan's analysis of the Mymensingh riots (Home Political Progs A, December 1907, n. 57-63); *Mihir o Sudhakar*, 14 June 1907 (RNP(B) for week ending 22 June 1907); and the *Bengalee's* analysis of the Iswargunj riots, 1 June 1906. For an account of the riots and their causes, cf. below, Chapter VIII.
[200] Reprinted in the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* of 12 July 1906.
[201] Minto to Morley, 19 March 1907—Minto Papers, M. 1007.

next day, it thundered "Let Young Bengal Answer the Question", recalling the appeal of Draupadi to Bhima (there had been some cases of rape in the Mymensingh riots); and letters were published condemning reconciliation efforts and demanding the use of force against force.[202] It described the Muslim rioters as "Indian Black Hundreds"[203]—blithely ignoring the vast differences in social character between the Russian revolutionaries of 1905 and Indian bhadralok nationalists. Subjectively, of course, men like Aurobindo were not communalists, but sincere patriots who would have been glad to obtain Muslim support; the mistake they made was in assuming that the national movement could succeed in Bengal even against the hostility of Muslims. Since the latter comprised 71.39 per cent of the population in Mymensingh, 70.57 per cent in Tippera, 68.31 per cent in Bakargunj, 61.89 per cent in Faridpur and 52.26 per cent in Dacca[204]—the five districts in East Bengal where the swadeshi movement had attained its greatest strength—failure to win Muslim support objectively necessitated a shift from methods of mass action to elite action.

Where the political leaders failed, it was Rabindranath who came forward with the response which seems historically the most adequate today. The 1907 riots have very great significance from the point of view of the development of Tagore's thought. The original retreat from active politics might have been due to the poetic temperament alone—one remembers the famous poem "Farewell" in *Kheya* dated 14 Chitra 1312 (1906).[205] But when, after a significant silence on political subjects for nearly nine months (Bhadra 1313—Sravana 1314), Rabindranath came out with a series of immensely

[202] *Bande Mataram*, 11 May 1907, 27 May 1907.

[203] "The East Bengal Disturbances"—editorial in *ibid*, 25 May 1907.

[204] I take the figures from the Lyon Circular on Muslims in the Civil Service, No. 5221-3C of 25 May 1906—reprinted in *Bengalee*, 13 June 1906.

[205] *Biday deho, kshama amay bhai,*
Kajer pathe ami to ar nai.
—R.R.X, pp. 150-51.

important essays during 1907-8,[206] we see a decisive break with the temper of much of his own earlier swadeshi writings and a return (on a higher plane, one is tempted to add) to a basically antitraditionalist and modernist approach. That the riots contributed significantly to the change is evident from Rabindranath's continual harping on them in practically every one of these essays.

Three points stand out in Rabindranath's new approach. First, while not denying the role of the British in helping to instigate the riots, he bluntly declared: "That Muslims could be used against Hindus is the really worrying fact, who used them is not as important. Satan cannot enter till he finds a flaw..."[207] The root of the evil lay in the social traditions of the Hindus, which have made them look upon Muslims as socially inferior aliens. Debkumar Raychaudhuri in a pamphlet written in 1906 had made a similar point, urging the Hindus to modify their traditional customs for the sake of the greater ideal of national unity[208]—and Rabindranath now warmly praised this little-known essay published from Barisal.[209] Where he went beyond Raychaudhuri, however, was in connecting the communal barrier with the gulf between the predominantly Hindu educated elite and the masses—"A great ocean separates us educated few from millions in our country."[210] To bridge this gulf was the prerequisite for any really national movement, and this could not be achieved by sentimental effusions over the motherland or oratorical flourishes alone. In fact, Rabindranath asserted

[206] "Byadhi o pratikar", Sravana 1314 (1907); "Pabna Presidential Address", Phalgun 1314 (1908); "Path o patheo", Jaistha 1315 (1908): "Samashya", Asar 1315 (1908); "Sadupay", Sravana 1315 (1908)—all in R.R.X. "Purba o pashchim", Bhadra 1315 (1908)—R.R. XII.

[207] "Byadhi o pratikar", R.R. X, p. 627.

[208] Debkumar Raychaudhuri, "Byadhi o pratikar" (Barisal 1313/1906), pp. 45, 52.

[209] *Prabasi*, Aswin 1314 (1907). The praise is all the more striking, as the pamphlet had sharply attacked Tagore's proposal for a single deshnayak on the ground that this would not contribute to Hindu-Muslim unity, Debkumar Raychaudhuri, *op. cit.*, p. 52.

[210] "Byadhi o pratikar", R.R.X, p. 634.

that the tactics adopted to fight the partition—rightly felt to be a danger to the unity of the country—had, paradoxically enough, sometimes contributed to enhance the same danger. Boycott, conceived as an end in itself, had been imposed on low-caste Hindus and Muslims through methods of social ostracism which Rabindranath now openly condemned.[211] It was from this point of view of weakness springing out of the alienation from the common people that Rabindranath went on to condemn terrorism in "Ways and Means" and "The Problem".[212] The moral argument is also present, but—interestingly enough—it is definitely secondary; what Tagore is criticising above all is the attempt to take a short-cut to success.

The alternative which Rabindranath puts forward is, as before, patient, sustained, unostentatious constructive work in the villages—organising associations, introducing cooperative techniques in agriculture and handicrafts, instilling a sense of unity and selfreliance among the raiyats, so that national consciousness really reaches out to the masses.[213] The second major theme thus became a passionate plea for mass contact through constructive work—"Come down into the midst of the people of our country, spread out a network of multifarious welfare activities, expand the scope of your work, broaden it in all directions—so that high and low, Hindus and Muslims and Christians, all without exception can come together, mingling heart with heart, effort with effort."[214] The extremists considered mass contact valuable, but assumed it to be already achieved or easily attainable through rhetoric, songs and festivals. Debiprasanna Roychaudhuri's *Nabyabharat* from 1906 onwards had shown considerable awareness of flagging mass support for swadeshi,[215]

[211] Tagore, "Sadupay"—R.R.X, pp. 524, 527.
[212] "Path o patheo", "Samashya"—R.R.X.
[213] "Pabna Presidential Address"—R.R.X, pp. 514-21.
[214] "Path o patheo", R.R.X, p. 465.
[215] "Barshiki" (editorial)—Baisakh 1313 (1906); "Bideshi barjan o swadeshi grahan", (editorial)—Asar 1313 (1906); "Bande mataram mantra, democracy o daridra-samashya" (editorial)—Paus 1313

and Krishnakumar Mitra's *Sanjibani* in February 1908 called for patient work among the poor[216]—but neither of these two Brahmo journals were able to grasp with anything like Rabindranath's clarity the link between the communal and the social issues. Debiprasanna had called for revenge for the Jamalpur atrocities,[217] and Krishnakumar had echoed the convenient nationalist theory that the quarrel was "between Hindus and some hired hands".[218]

In the third place, the riots led Rabindranath to pose the most general problem before India in a new way. The ideal is no longer a return to the glorious Hindu past, to the self-sustaining samaj unifying diversities by giving each community its particular niche in the functional specialisation of the caste system. What is demanded now is a wholesale breaking-down of walls, a decisive rejection of sectarian barriers and the building of a Mahajati in India on the basis of a broad humanism. That this would imply the discarding of much of Hindu tradition is openly avowed—"A people whose religion teaches them to despise others, whose heaven is supposed to be ruined by drinking water touched by a neighbour, who have to protect their sanctity by insulting others—such a people deserves no better fate than humiliation."[219] Anti-traditionalism in fact was to pervade virtually all of Tagore's post-1907 writings. The vision of an India united on a modern basis transcending all barriers of caste, religion and race inspired the last pages of *Gora*; it found magnificent expression in three famous poems of *Gitanjali* written, interestingly

(1906); "Sahoore neta o gnae chasha" (Kartikchandra Dasgupta)—Asar 1314 (1907).

[216] "...the country will not be saved by mere frothy eloquence. A band of patient workers is wanted for this purpose...our Mother is staying in the houses of our poverty-stricken brothers, those people whom we have so long driven away because they are poor and helpless". "What is the Path"—*Sanjibani*, 5 February 1908 (RNP(B) for week ending 15 February 1908).

[217] "Samadhan" (editorial)—*Nabyabharat*, Jaistha 1314 (1907).

[218] Speech at the Mymensingh district conference—*Bengalee*, 1 May 1907.

[219] "Byadhi o pratikar," R.R. X, pp. 628-29.

enough, on three successive days, 18-20 Asar 1317 (1910) ("Awaken my mind by the sacred shore of India's sea of humanity", "Where lie the lowliest and the humblest of men", and "Thou hast dishonoured them, my hapless land"[220]—and it is embodied again of course in the song which one day was to become free India's national anthem.

All this was a direct challenge to the whole approach and temper of political extremism. Already in 1906, Pal had criticised universalism as a factor diluting patriotic fervour[221] and in April 1907 Aurobindo had demarcated passive resistance from mere "selfdevelopment and selfhelp" and rebuked an unnamed "poet of sweetness and love" for his unpractical advice.[222] But what may be described as the classic confrontation between the two trends came in June 1907. The occasion was twofold—a speech by Rabindranath at Chittagong on 17 June 1907 where he had reiterated his view that neither the "old party" nor the "new" was doing "real work... (which) lies in coming into touch with the masses";[223] and Asutosh Chaudhuri's presidential address at the Pabna district conference (21 June 1907) repeating his 1904 call of constructive work to the virtual exclusion of political agitation for swaraj. The answer came in the shape of a brilliantly-written *Bande Mataram* editorial entitled "Mr A. Chaudhuri's Policy" on 22 June 1907 which deserves extensive quotation. The reaction against mendicancy, the editorial observes, had taken two forms: "One, thoughtful, philosophic, idealistic, dreamed of ignoring the terrible burden that was crushing us to death, of turning away from politics and dedicating our strength in the village and township, developing our resources, our social, economic, religious life regardless of the intrusive alien; it thought of inaugurating a new revolution such as the world had never yet seen, a moral, peaceful revolution, actively developing ourselves but

[220] *Hey mor chitta, punya tirthe jago re dhire; Jethay thake sabar adham diner hote din; Hey mor durbhaga desh.*
[221] "Nation ba jati"—*Bangadarshan*, Sravana 1313 (1906).
[222] Aurobindo, *Doctrine of Passive Resistance* (1948).
[223] *Bande Mataram*, 20 June 1907.

only passively resisting the adversary." This was the ideal of "peaceful ashrams and swadeshism and selfhelp", noble but unpractical as the British were sure to interfere with such efforts sooner or later. The second trend sprang from "the conviction that subjection was the one curse which withered and blighted all our national activities... The resolve was to rise and fight and fall and again rise and fight and fall waging the battle for ever until this once great and free nation should again be great and free." A few weeks later we read a similarly eloquent and moving appeal—"Let Maya pass out of us, let illusion die; let us turn with clear eyes and sane minds from these pale and alien phantoms (the instruments of British rule) to the true reality of our Mother as she rises from the living death of a century, and in her seek our only strength and our sufficient inspiration."[224]

The magnificent rhetoric almost carries us off our feet, and we can imagine its impact—as conveyed also, even more effectively, through the vernacular journals, *Sandhya*, *Nabasakti* and *Yugantar*—on the excited educated youth of Bengal, to whom Tagore's advice must have appeared all too timid and anaemic. And yet the necessary corrective can be found from the pages of the *Bande Mataram* itself, where the district newsletters often seem to run counter to the tone of vibrant semimystic optimism struck by the editorials. Thus we read of mullas spreading the communal virus in Midnapur (17 May 1907), Pabna (21-22 May 1907), Chittagong (1 June 1907), Jessore (11 June 1907) and Nadia (28 June 1907), everywhere inciting Muslim tenants against Hindu landlords. Fiery calls for a new educational boycott as a reply to the Risley Circular of May 1907[225] obviously get little or no response; the volunteer movement is admitted to be by no means fully organised or truly widespread;[226] and the militant resolutions passed at Pabna despite Asutosh

[224] "From Phantom to Reality"—*Bande Mataram* (editorial), 13 July 1907.
[225] *Ibid*, 14 May, 29 May, 11 July 1907.
[226] *Ibid*, leader of 27 July 1907.

Chaudhuri's moderation remain unimplemented—the 'Pabna Notes' of 3 August 1907 deplore the absence of "any attempt on the part of our lawyer-leaders to give effect to the various social, industrial and political resolutions said to have been unanimously passed in the conference". Repression broke the back of the open movement with surprising ease during the second half of 1908, and in his famous Uttarpara speech of June 1909, Aurobindo gave a vivid description of the change in atmosphere—"When I went to jail the whole country was alive with the cry of Bande Mataram, alive with the hope of a nation, the hope of millions of men who had newly risen out of degradation. When I came out of jail I listened for that cry, but there was instead a silence. A hush had fallen on the country, and men seemed bewildered. . ."[227] Thus a contradiction had developed between the militant ideals of a group of extremists burning with patriotic zeal, and the objective situation—the predominant apathy of the Hindu masses, active hostility on the part of at least a section of the Muslims; and it is in this contradiction, I suggest, that we must seek the roots of terrorism.

The *Bande Mataram* remained formally committed to the creed of passive resistance, but it brushed aside pleas for more preparations,[228] and asserted that sufficiently bold leadership could take the uneducated masses with it—in fact, "with the masses ignorance is undoubtedly a bliss. Education, however much it may sharpen the perceptions, tends to weaken national and international sympathies."(!)[229] The *Nabasakti* went a step further, describing passive resistance—the creed being "lauded to the skies by a respected leader of the Transvaal"—as futile in times of real trouble.[230] Already on 3 March 1907, the *Yugantar* had criticised passive resistance as insufficient—"Without bloodshed the worship of the

[227] Sri Aurobindo, *Uttarpara Speech* (4th Ed., 1943) p. 2.
[228] "The Fallacy of Unpreparedness"—editorial in *Bande Mataram*, 13 June 1907.
[229] "The So-called Drag"—editorial in *ibid*, 26 February 1907.
[230] *Nabasakti*, 10 December 1907—RNP(B) for week ending 14 December 1907.

goddess will not be accomplished"—and it had added the significant hint: "And what is the number of English officials in each district? With a firm resolve you can bring English rule to an end in a single day."[231] In course of a polemic with the *Sandhya*—still in the main committed to the creed of passive resistance—the *Yugantar* in August 1907 developed a fullscale theory of elite action. Mass awakening was a necessity, it admitted, but there was a "slight confusion" regarding "the means to be employed in waking the country and the degree of awakening which would suffice to remove the chains". "Never did the people as a whole in any country prepare themselves for riots, nor will they ever do so... If we sit idle, and hesitate to rise till the whole population are goaded to desperation, then we shall continue idle till the end of time... The next point is—how to wake the country? Mere words will not make the country fit for the task... Power is developed by struggling with the opponent... Without blood, O Patriots! will the country awake?"[232] Here we have the essence of the whole theory of "maximum sacrifice by minimum men",[233] of the elite rousing the mass through heroic martyrdom. An illegal pamphlet in 1909, hailing the matyrdom of Madanlal Dhingra and written by an emigre group, gives a more sophisticated justification of individual terror—"Terrorise the officials, English and Indian, and the collapse of the whole machinery of oppression is not very far... This campaign of separate assassinations is the best conceivable method of paralysing the bureaucracy and rousing the people."[234]

There can be no doubt at all that terrorism made a great positive contribution to our national movement, with its examples of sacrifice and death-defying heroism for the sake

[231] RNP(B) for week ending 9 March 1907.
[232] *Yugantar*, 26 August 1907--RNP(B) for week ending 21 August 1907
[233] Gopal Haldar, "Revolutionary Terrorism"—*Studies in the Bengal Renaissance* (1958), p. 226.
[234] *Bande Mataram*, p. 7—copy preserved in Home Political Progs Deposit, April 1911, n. 7.

of complete independence—an ideal, by the way, which in practice was soon virtually abandoned, at least as an immediately realisable goal, by the extremist leaders, and which the Congress as a whole did not formally accept till 1930. The Indian revolutionaries, wandering throughout the world in perennial quest for shelter and foreign arms, helped to end the parochialism of our national movement, and brought it into touch with international anti-imperialist and socialist currents. Thus the 1909 pamphlet already cited declares: "Dhingra's pistol shot has been heard by the Irish cottier in his forlorn hut, by the Egyptian fellah in the field, by the Zulu labourer in the dark mine. . .the Briton has become a pest in the world, and the destruction of his empire is the sine qua non of the progress of the human race."[235] There is very little of Hindu religiosity in pamphlets like these—and already in 1907, Hemchandra Kanungo had contacted the Russian socialist underground in Paris.[236]

Yet it would be unhistorical to ignore the other side of the picture. Terrorism in Bengal diverted a whole generation of educated youth into the path of elite action, and helped to postpone for a long time any move to draw the masses into active political struggle. Its social limitations are obvious—out of 186 persons convicted of revolutionary crimes or killed in committing them during 1907-17, no less than 165 came from the three upper castes of Brahmin, Kayastha and Baidya.[237] The shift to militant elite action, we have seen, was not unnatural—and yet Rabindranath's unheeded warning perhaps had a point: "My impatience never makes any road in the world shorter, nor does time lessen itself for my special benefit."[238]

At the same time, it would be wrong to credit Tagore with an alternative entirely cogent or satisfactory. Not only was he quite unsuited temperamentally to be a political leader; his repeated pleas for constructive work, apart from their

[235] *Ibid*, p. 5.
[236] Cf. below, Chapter IX.
[237] *Sedition Committee* (*Rowlatt*) *Report* (*1918*)—Annexure II.
[238] "Path o patheo", R.R. X, p. 451.

obvious lack of imaginative appeal in the Bengal of 1907-8, also left unanswered the question as to what methods to follow if the British interfered—as they were surely bound to do if and when the movement for autonomous development became really formidable.[239] Above all, Rabindranath could not really suggest any concrete social or economic programme with which to rouse the uneducated masses. His constructive rural work amounted to little more than humanitarianism, the appeal to zamindars[240] was surely utopian, and the basic problems of land relations remained untouched. Thus while aware of the crucial need to bridge the gap between the bhadralok and the masses, Rabindranath could not suggest any real solution to the problem, and his growing isolation was only to be expected.

And so Gora's realisation can find no correlative in action, and we meet instead the noble but rather ineffective figure of Nikhilesh of *Ghare-Baire* (The Home and the World)—the enlightened and progressive zamindar who had tried to promote selfreliance and swadeshi long before these became fashionable,[241] but who now faces isolation, ridicule and hostility due to his opposition to the coercive methods being used by political leaders like Sandwip against his tenants who are too poor to afford swadeshi goods. A believer in the emancipation of women, he has to watch his wife Bimala being swept off her feet by the virile but essentially nihilistic personality of Sandwip. The novel ends with Bimala staring out over deserted fields towards the blood-red horizon, awaiting the return of her husband who had gone out alone to stop a communal riot. The complexities of the swadeshi age—its grandeur and its pettiness, its triumphs and problems and tragedies—have indeed been immortalised in the writings of the greatest literary figure of the times.

[239] This was Ramendrasundar Trivedi's criticism—*Prabasi*, Aswin 1314 (1907).
[240] "Pabna Presidential Address"—R.R. X, p. 518.
[241] *Ghare-Baire*—R.R. VIII, pp. 154, 229-30.

Chapter Three

SWADESHI ENTERPRISE AND BOYCOTT

I. The Genesis and Ideology of Economic Swadeshi

In its specifically economic aspect, swadeshi may be defined as the sentiment—closely associated with many phases of Indian nationalism—that indigenous goods should be preferred by consumers even if they were more expensive than and inferior in quality to their imported substitutes, and that it was the patriotic duty of men with capital to pioneer such industries even though profits initially might be minimal or nonexistent. Swadeshi thus is a term of narrower scope than indigenous enterprise, much of which could, and often did, follow the more profitable frankly compradore lines. My purpose here is to examine the roots and nature of this ideology, developing in Bengal from about 1870 to a point of climax in the 1905 days, and to investigate the extent—rather meagre, as we shall see—to which this swadeshi spirit could manifest itself through economic activities having, or at least claiming, a patriotic component.

Swadeshi ideology in Bengal, like Minerva's owl, began its flight only after dusk. Despite some valiant recent efforts to prove the contrary,[1] it still seems fairly safe to assert that the nineteenth century was marked by the decline of many of India's—and Bengal's—traditional handicrafts. That at least was the assumption commonly made by nationalist and official circles alike—an 1890 survey for instance admitted that all Bengali handicrafts were declining except woodwork, brass-

[1] Morris D. Morris, "Towards a Reinterpretation of Nineteenth Century Indian Economic History" (*Journal of Economic History*, December 1963) and "Trends and Tendencies in Indian Economic History" (*Indian Economic and Social History Review*, Volume V, No. 4, 1968).

ware, matwork and pottery,[2] and a 1908 report spoke of a 5 per cent decrease in the number of weavers and their dependants in Bengal between 1891 and 1901[3]—and even if exaggerated, this theory of industrial ruin undoubtedly influenced swadeshi thinking very profoundly.

If the decline in indigenous industrial techniques ruled out the possibility of the producer becoming merchant and capitalist in the "really revolutionary way"[4] of the Marxian model, the alternative Prussian or Japanese or even Tsarist-Russian path of state-aided industrial development was also impossible under colonial conditions. Minto and Ibbetson in their private correspondence admitted the justice of the familiar nationalist charge of discrimination against Bombay textiles —"the excise duty on cotton" was "quite inexcusable. Of course it exists simply in the interests of Manchester goods . . . No selfgoverning colony would stand such things for five minutes."[5] Official economic policy in the nineteenth century cannot really be explained in terms of an abstract creed of laissez faire,[6] and government expenditure in the railway, military and public works departments did encourage certain types of industries;[7] the crucial point is that the benefits of such state patronage went overwhelmingly to Europeans.[8]

[2] R. W. Collin, *Report on the Existing Arts and Industries of Bengal, 1890*—quoted in J. G. Cumming, *Review of the Industrial Position and Prospects in Bengal in 1908*, p. 5.
[3] G. N. Gupta, *A Survey of the Industries and Resources of Eastern Bengal and Assam for 1907-08* (1908), p. 8.
[4] Karl Marx, *Capital*, Volume III (1894), Chapter XX, p. 393.
[5] Minto to Ibbetson, 7 December 1907, replying to a letter dated 21 November 1907 in which that by no means Indophil bureaucrat had suggested a private appeal to Morley for a reexamination of the excise issue. Minto felt that "political consideration, such as the Manchester vote" would rule out any such measure. Minto Papers, Correspondence with Persons in India, M. 981.
[6] Sabyasachi Bhattacharyya, "Laissez Faire in India"—*Indian Economic and Social History Review*, Volume II, No. 1 (January 1965).
[7] Sunil Kumar Sen, *Studies in Industrial Policy and Development of India* (1964), pp. 3-4.
[8] Amiya Kumar Bagchi, "European and Indian Entrepreneurship in

In Western India, certain indigenous business groups—most notably at first the Parsis—were able to utilise their well-established compradore position in commerce as a springboard for genuine industrial development.[9] In Bengal, however, the age of great Calcutta merchants and entrepreneurs—quite often of upper-caste origin (Ramdulal De, Dwarkanath Tagore, Digambar Mitra)—collaborating and competing on equal terms with the British was definitely over by the 1850s.[10] With a few exceptions like the Bhagyakul Roys with rice and jute trading interests, the Bengali business community by the late nineteenth century consisted of socially not-too respectable "second-hand merchants and commission traders doing smallscale business"[11]—as for example the Shaha caste in many parts of East Bengal—and even here the Bengali was being squeezed out by the Marwari trader.[12] The English-educated elite which was to spearhead the national—and swadeshi—movement in Bengal derived its income from the liberal professions (government service, education, law, medicine, journalism), with which was often combined rent from zamindari or intermediate tenure-holding; it was hardly a bourgeoisie in the precise sense of the term. British capital in the meantime had consolidated its

India, 1900-30"—in Leach and Mukherji (ed.), *Elites in South Asia*, Cambridge (1970), pp. 224-28.

[9] Ashok V. Desai, "The Origins of Parsi Enterprise"—*Indian Economic and Social History Review*, Volume V, No. 4 (December 1968).

[10] Chittabrata Palit, "Indigenous Business Enterprise in Bengal, 1780-1880"—*The Quarterly Review of Historical Studies*, Volume VI (1966-67), No. 4. N. K. Sinha, "Indian Business Enterprise : Its Failure in Calcutta (1800-1848)"—*Bengal Past and Present*, Diamond Jubilee Number (1967).

[11] N. K. Sinha, *op. cit.*, p. 120.

[12] "About this time (1891-92) another matter began seriously to occupy my thoughts... the adventurous non-Bengalis, notably the Marwaris from the barren deserts of Rajputana, were swarming not only in Calcutta but also in the interior of Bengal and capturing all key-points of the export and import business..." — Prafulla C. Ray, *Life and Experiences of a Bengali Chemist* (Calcutta, 1932), Vol. I, pp. 89-90.

position in Bengal, dominating the structure of overseas and wholesale trade and finance, and establishing through the managing-agency system a firm grip over the new lines of business—jute, tea and coal.[13]

In 1867 Kishorilal Mukherji started the Sibpur Iron Works near Howrah, which was still in operation in the swadeshi period, with 110 workers in 1908.[14] The next really successful Bengali industrial effort came only in 1893, when Prafullachandra Ray started his Bengal Chemicals.[15] Yet it was precisely this period which saw the emergence of a swadeshi ideology—1867 is also the date of the Hindu Mela, with its exhibitions of swadeshi crafts. Psychologically this paradox is not difficult to explain—as the editor of the *Mukherji's Magazine* assured Bholanath Chandra, "The disorganisation of commerce at present has disposed mercantile men usually impatient of literature, to an attentive hearing to any prophet who discourses on the 'why and wherefore' of their present situation and the 'what next'."[16] Western education made the intelligentsia intensely aware of the contrast between the prosperous industrialised West and poverty-stricken, famine-ravaged India. From Naoroji, Ranade, Digby, and above all Romesh Chandra Dutt's two monumental volumes (published in 1901 and 1903), it learnt that this tragic contrast was no decree of blind fate, but the result of deliberate British policy. The foreign rulers had used "the arm of political injustice" to destroy the traditional handicrafts of India, thus creating the "present helpless dependence on agriculture";[17] the latter in its turn had been ruined by an

[13] Amiya Kumar Bagchi, *op. cit.*, pp. 229-32, 235-40.

[14] *Howrah District Gazetteer* (ed. L.S.S. O'Malley, 1909), pp. 108-9. In size it was of course dwarfed by the Howrah Iron Works of Burn & Company, which employed 3968 operatives.

[15] Sunil Kumar Sen, "Economic Enterprise (1833-1914)"—*Studies in the Bengal Renaissance* (1958), pp. 546-47.

[16] Shambhuchandra Mukherji to Bholanath Chandra, 13 January 1873—in Monmothanath Ghosh, *Manishi Bholanath Chandra* (1924), p. 172.

[17] R. C. Dutt, *The Economic History of India under Early British Rule* (Eighth impression, 1956)—Preface, p. viii. The first phrase was taken by Dutt from H. H. Wilson.

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excessive land tax; and to all this had been added a crippling "drain of wealth" in the form of first 'investment' and later home charges, which India was meeting only through a harmful and deceptive export-surplus.[18] India had thus been reduced to the status of supplier of raw materials and market for British manufactured goods; protection of what remained of the traditional crafts and a vigorous drive for industrialisation on modern lines were the obvious ways of ending this condition of dependence.

Dr Bipan Chandra has shown with a wealth of detail how the nationalist press in the last quarter of the nineteenth century adopted as its central economic thesis the need for industrialisation as the sovereign remedy for the growing poverty of India.[19] It is true that down to 1905, this campaign tended to have a mendicant slant, with the government being urged through innumerable Congress resolutions to promote technical education, modify its stores purchase rules, reduce the burden of home charges and, above all, change its anti-Indian tariff policy. Yet appeals for selfhelp through swadeshi and boycott were also not uncommon. Bholanath Chandra in his famous essay "A Voice for the Commerce and Manufactures of India", published in the *Mukherji's Magazine* between 1873 and 1876, had appealed to his countrymen to consider industrialisation as "the ocean to the rivers of all their thoughts".[20] He ended with a clear call for boycott to "dethrone King Cotton of Manchester".[21] "It would be no crime for us to take the only but most effectual weapon of moral hostility, left us in our last extremity. Let us make use of this potent weapon by resolving to non-consume the goods of England. . ."[22] In 1876 Akshoy-

[18] These are three central themes of R. C. Dutt's prefaces to his two volumes—in fact they recur throughout his works.

[19] Bipan Chandra, *The Rise and Growth of Economic Nationalism in India* (1966), Chapters II, III.

[20] *Mukherji's Magazine*, Volume II (1873)—quoted in *ibid*, p. 66.

[21] Monmothanath Ghosh, *op. cit.*, p. 188, quoting from the second part of Bholanath Chandra's article.

[22] *Mukherji's Magazine*, Volume V (1876)—quoted in Bipan Chandra, op. cit., p. 126.

chandra Sarkar's weekly *Sadharani* spoke of a group of Dacca youths who had taken a collective vow to abjure foreign cloth.[23] The two classic instances of tariff injustice—the abolition of cotton import duties in 1882 and the imposition of the countervailing excise in 1896—both led to widespread calls for boycott, mainly in Bombay and Poona newspapers but also to some extent in Bengal.[24] And though before 1905 boycott was usually considered as a means to remove economic grievances alone, a few suggestions for a more political use can also be traced—as for instance during the agitation against the Age of Consent Bill in the early '90s, when the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* anticipated a major feature of swadeshi propaganda with its story of alleged impurities in foreign salt.[25]

Fundamentally, then, the economic thought of the swadeshi age was not original, and the extremist leaders themselves, despite their contempt for other aspects of mendicant politics, handsomely acknowledged their debt to the moderates in this one respect.[26] Yet swadeshi economics did have a flavour of its own, and contained nuances and elements at least relatively new.

There was first the very obvious fact of popularisation.

[23] *Sadharani*, 7 Chaitra 1282 (1876)—quoted in Soumendra Gangopadhyay, *Swadeshi andolan o bangla sahitya (1367/1960)*, p. 11.

[24] For a detailed account, see Bipan Chandra, *op. cit.*, pp. 126-30.

[25] In connection with a report on the impurities in English salt and sugar published in the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* of 19 August 1905, Calcutta Police Commissioner Halliday informed Carlyle (chief secretary. government of Bengal) on 26 August—"I understand that during the Age of Consent Bill the same hare was started by the *Amrita Bazar Patrika*", Home Public Progs Deposit, September 1905, n. 25.

[26] "... it was Mr Naoroji who first forced the question of Indian poverty into prominence, and for this India owes him a debt of gratitude deeper than that due to any other of our older politicians dead or living"—"The Man of the Past and the Man of the Future", *Bande Mataram*, 26 December 1906 (an article otherwise devoted to proving the inferiority of Naoroji to Tilak, "the man of the future")—Haridas and Uma Mukherjee, *Sri Aurobindo and the New Thought in Indian Politics* (1964), p. 4. Cf. also the obituary of R. C. Dutt in *Dharma* (edited by Aurobindo), 20 Agrahayan 1316 (1909).

The themes of industrial devastation, economic drain, and the need for swadeshi and boycott were now heard everywhere—not only in formal treatises and newspaper articles, but also in songs and plays and 'jatras' and hosts of vernacular pamphlets.[27] Sakharam Ganesh Deuskar's *Desher Katha* (Story of the Country)—an exposition in Bengali of the doctrines of Naoroji, Digby and Dutt—became immensely popular, running into four editions between June 1904 and October 1907, with 10,000 copies in all.[28] Popularisation naturally brought with it certain changes, in form as well as in content. Old arguments could not but acquire a new flavour when put in the form of a dialogue between swadeshi leader Ramesh Babu and peasant Gopi Ghosh,[29] or when combined with frank appeals to religious and caste prejudices which would have made the good Victorian liberal R. C. Dutt shudder.[30] Again, while the moderate economists had considered industrial revival to be just one item in a comprehensive programme of economic and political reform, the euphoria generated by the 1905 days produced a tendency for a time to consider swadeshi and boycott as a sort of panacea for all the ills of India. Boycott and swadeshi would "mutually stimulate" each other, the first creating a "sure market" for the second; the consequent gains of the artisan, entrepreneur and swadeshi merchant would mean "more money in the hands of the mercantile class and of investors in swadeshi companies and therefore more capital

[27] For a more detailed account of the communication media used in the swadeshi age, see below, Chapter VI.

[28] The *Bengal Library Catalogue* for the relevant years gives the following publication data for *Desher Katha* :

1st edition, 16 June 1904, 1000 copies.
2nd edition, 12 October 1905, 2000 copies.
3rd edition, 5 February 1906, 5000 copies.
4th edition, 18 October 1907, 2000 copies.

[29] Charuchandra Basu Majumdar, *Bartaman samashya o swadeshi andolan* (November 1905).

[30] Cf., for example, Nikhilnath Roy, *Sonar bangla* (1906), p. 142. Gispathi Raychaudhuri, *Bideshi bahishkar o swadeshi mahatmya* (1907), pp. 28-36.

available for investment in swadeshi manufacture".[31] Such was "the naive extremist theory of a selfsustaining process of growth".[32] British traders were buying increasing quantities of foodgrains and agricultural raw materials for export, thus allegedly forcing up prices and causing periodic famines; here, too, boycott was the solution, since the money for such purchases presumably came from the sale of foreign imports—and the reduction in the export-surplus might even throw out of gear the mechanism for the drain of wealth from India.[33] But of course the leaders of extremism realised that all this was impossible without basic political changes—as a pamphlet brought out in the autumn of 1906 from the *Yugantar* press declared, the focus must be on the winning of freedom.[34] So the emphasis shifted soon enough from constructive swadeshi to the new politics of passive resistance, of which economic boycott and the promotion of indigenous industries formed just a part and no more.

The employment-creating potential of industrialisation formed another major theme of swadeshi propaganda. The absolute volume of educated unemployment may have been exaggerated;[35] the fact remains that very many in Bengal had come to feel that a faulty system of education combined with lack of industrial development had led to the services and the professions becoming seriously overcrowded. This is how Prafullachandra Ray explains the motives behind his setting-up of Bengal Chemicals—"Our educated young men, the moment they came out of their colleges,

[31] "Graduated Boycott"—*Bande Mataram*, 26 April 1907. Haridas and Uma Mukherjee, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

[32] Amales Tripathi, *The Extremist Challenge* (1967), p. 119.

[33] Biprodas Pal Chaudhuri in his reply to a question regarding ways of spending the National Fund—"Prashnottar", *Bhandar*, Kartik 1312 (1905). Gispati Raychaudhuri, *op. cit.*, pp. 12-28. Surjyakumar Ghoshal, *Bharate annakashta* (1908), p. 7.

[34] Jogendranath Sarkar, *Jatiya samashya* (Printed at 41 Champatala 1st Lane, November 1906), pp. 11-13.

[35] This at least is the conclusion of a careful official analysis of "The Economic Pressure on the Middle Classes" in 1915—*Bengal District Administration Committee Report, 1913-14*, Chapter IX.

were on the look out for a situation or a soft job under the Government..., or failing that in a European mercantile firm. The professions were becoming overcrowded. A few came out of the Engineering College, but they too were helpless seekers after jobs... What to do with all these young men?... How to bring bread to the mouths of the ill-fed, famished young men of the middle classes?"[36] In November 1905, the school teacher Kaliprasanna Dasgupta in a militant speech calling for a boycott of examinations appealed to the students to take to the path of industry and commerce—there were far too many lawyers already, he declared (80 muktears in Madaripur subdivision alone), and government jobs were both scanty and degrading.[37] In 1907 Dakshinaranjan Ghosh brought out an *Industrial Guide* as a kind of handbook for prospective entrepreneurs; in a preface he explains what led him to undertake this venture—"I found myself unable to decide what to do with my younger brother who had just failed to graduate. Who can deny that there are many similarly situated at the present time?"[38]

The moderate economists had displayed an occasional nostalgia for the lost handicrafts of India, but their vision of the future was firmly modernist, seeking the solution of the poverty problem of our country in the rapid development of largescale factory industries.[39] The really new element in

[36] Prafulla C. Ray, *op. cit.*, pp. 89-92.

[37] The text of this speech, delivered at the Field and Academy Club meeting of 10 Agrahayan 1312, is given in Kedarnath Dasgupta, *Shikshar andolan* (1905), Part III.

[38] Dakshina R. Ghosh B.A., *The Industrial Guide* (1907), Preface.

[39] R. C. Dutt pointed to the virtues of artisan production—where "the individual man is at his best", and declared : "every true Indian hopes that...something of the home industries will survive the assaults of capitalism" [*The Economic History of India in the Victorian Age* (1903, 1956), pp. 518-19]. In his presidential address at the first Indian Industrial Conference (December 1905), however, Dutt stated that a shift in emphasis from cottage crafts to urban industries was inevitable. [*Report of the Indian Industrial Conference*, Benares, 1905]. Cf. also Bipan Chandra, *op. cit.*, 64-71, for the "near unanimity" with which the early nationalist leaders accepted industrial development on mo-

swadeshi thought was its partial repudiation of this western model, the beginnings of a cult of the handicraft, of the handloom and the charka (spinning-wheel)—anticipations, in fact, of much of Gandhian economics. Deuskar in his *Desher Katha* had estimated that the total replacement of the 216 crore yards annual import of Lancashire cloth by Indian mill cloth would require a capital investment of at least Rs 30 crores; but an expenditure of 2 crores, he declared, could set up 7 lakhs of improved fly-shuttle handlooms capable of turning out 126 crore yards of cloth. Such a policy would also provide employment for vast numbers, and be the salvation of the traditional weaving castes.[40] Arguments of this type became very common in the swadeshi days; they had a natural appeal in Bengal, where the industrial impetus, as we have seen, came from patriotic sentiment and fear of unemployment rather than any considerable accumulation of capital. Handicrafts of certain types could also attract the educated bhadralok through their artistic qualities, once he had been weaned away from the fashion of aping the West.[41] The prestige of the handloom was greatly enhanced by E. B. Havell's crusade in its favour, and Pramathanath Bose had to court some unpopularity for his statement that "Handloom alone cannot be reasonably expected to drive the foreign produce from our markets, or even to make a very serious impression upon it."[42]

In purely economic terms, the handloom-powerloom controversy had little point, since in Indian conditions both were

dern lines to be the "panacea for all the economic ills of the country" —*ibid*, p. 65.

40 Sakharam Ganesh Deuskar, *Desher Katha* (4th edition, 1907), pp. 194-206.

41 Cf. *Bharati*, Aswin 1312 [1905]—" 'Boycott' ebang 'swadeshiata' " [Boycott and Patriotism], an article by Pramathanath Chaudhuri which states that down to 1905 swadeshi had meant essentially the use of costly but artistic handmade goods by the educated minority.

42 "The Possibilities of Handloom Weaving in India"—quoted in Jogesh Chandra Bagal, *Pramathanath Bose* (1955), p. 93. The *Bengalee* of 1 April 1906 deplored the rather negative tone of this article, and emphasised the employment potential of handlooms.

evidently necessary and even in a sense interdependent. Despite the nineteenth century decline, handloom production in 1906 was estimated to be more than double the output of Indian mills; the latter were forging ahead in the 'coarse, medium' type of cloth, but could not yet turn out the finer varieties, while the powerloom was also found unsuitable for the production of cloth of the coarsest kind.[43] Indian handlooms consumed about one-third of the yarn produced in the Bombay spinning mills, and thus it is not surprising to find the industrialist V. D. Thackersey earnestly advocating the use of the improved handloom popularised by Havell.[44] The *Bengalee* campaigned for both Banga Lakshmi shares and the spread of the fly-shuttle handloom; the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* of 7 November 1905 wanted all possible sources of swadeshi supply to be explored—big weaving mills, small weaving factories, fly-shuttle looms; and a definite revival of handloom weaving was perhaps the most considerable achievement of swadeshi in Bengal.[45] The

[43] At the Benares Indian Industrial Conference, R. B. Patel (director of Agriculture and Industries, Baroda state) presented the following statistics, admittedly no more than "probable estimates", but still highly interesting :

CLOTH SUPPLY (IN MILLIONS OF YARDS)

	Indian handloom supply	*Indian mill supply*	*Foreign imports*	*Total consumption*
1. Coarse	900	60	300	1260
2. Coarse, Medium	150	500	1100	1750
3. Medium	450	40	750	1240
4. Fine	150	—	350	500
Total :	1650	600	2500	4750

— Quoted in G. N. Gupta, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

[44] V. D. Thackersey in a paper presented to the Industrial Conference (1905) estimated that out of a total production of 58 crore lbs of yarn by Indian spinning mills, 23½ crores were going to China, 13½ crores to weaving mills, 19 crores to handlooms, and 2 crores being made into rope and twine (*Report of Indian Industrial Conference (1905)*, pp. 68-70).

[45] See below.

'charka' was a much more dubious proposition, since here the indigenous tradition had been almost entirely uprooted.[46] Much was written in its favour in the swadeshi days—the 'charka', it was argued quite in the Gandhian style, would provide employment for village women and widows,[47] and it could also end the embarrassment of swadeshi handlooms depending for yarn of the finer counts on Lancashire imports.[48] A contemporary play ends with village women going back to the charka with gusto.[49] In October 1906, the Rakhi-Bandhan appeal issued by the leaders included

[46] Thus the once world-famous Dacca muslin could not be revived, as "The special yarn necessary for muslins used to be spun locally in Dacca, but this art is now completely forgotten, and all the yarn now used is machine-made" (G. N. Gupta, *op. cit.*, p. 11). Cf. also Gandhiji's account of his long and difficult search for the spinning wheel—*The Story of My Experiments with Truth* (1927, 1963), Part V, Chapters 29-30.

[47] Batakrishna Chattopadhyay, "Sekaler o ekaler charka" (The Charka of Yesterday and Today) — *Nabyabharat*, Agrahayan 1314 (1907). Another article—by Kartikchandra Dasgupta—suggested that young men should refuse to marry girls ignorant of spinning—"Shilponnotir ekti sahaj pantha" (An Easy Way of Developing Industry), *Ibid*, Chaitra 1312 (1906). Articles suggesting improvements in the traditional charka were published in *Prabasi*, Sravana 1313 (1906) and *Swadeshi*, Asar, Bhadra 1313 (1906).

[48] Kartikchandra Dasgupta in the article cited above felt the charka to be indispensable, as the output of Indian spinning mills was inadequate and British yarn too expensive. The *Amrita Bazar Patrika* wrote in an editorial note of 1 November 1907—"We have urged again and again in these columns that so long we cannot spin our own thread, so long we cannot honestly say that we have abjured foreign cotton fabrics. And the charka is the best means for helping in this matter. The introduction of the charka has become essential in view of the fact that rotten and rejected stuff are being imported and sold to our simple-minded weavers... If every householder makes the thread required for clothing his family, then we can be independent of Manchester without practically any effort on our part."

[49] Amritalal Basu, *Sabash bangali* (Bravo Bengalees), December 1905. p. 61. See also below for a more detailed account of this fascinating play.

the use of charka in the general swadeshi vow.[50] But only Motilal Ghosh among the top leaders seems to have taken the 'charka' really seriously, and he was laughed out by V. D. Thackersey and other industrialists when he tried to raise the question at the subjects committee of the 1906 Industrial Conference.[51] With the Chinese yarn market so uncertain,[52] the Bombay industry had no reason to welcome a possible competitor; it would have liked the swadeshi agitators to concentrate on handlooms, serving—as Gandhi later put it—as "voluntary agents of the Indian spinning mills".[53] The later tolerance for khadi was probably a reflection of the new selfconfidence won by the industry through the war boom.[54]

The controversy over the kind of industrial development suited to India was not a purely economic one; it involved from the beginning important social and ideological issues. By the turn of the century, Indian intellectuals were becoming increasingly aware of the social evils produced by largescale industry in the capitalist West—the two poles of

[50] *Bengalee*, 9 October 1906.

[51] Pramathanath Bose, "Reminiscences and Reflections of a Septuagenarian"— *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 21 February 1932. Quoted in J. C. Bagal, *op. cit.*, p. 97.

[52] D. R. Gadgil, *op. cit.*, pp. 100-1.

[53] M. K. Gandhi, *op. cit.*, p. 299.

[54] Cf. the illuminating account by Gandhi of a conversation with a millowner during the early days of the khadi movement—*op. cit.*, pp. 302-3. The millowner frankly recalled the way the industry had exploited the swadeshi movement—"We raised the prices of cloth, and did even worse thing"; with a booming home demand for Indian cloth, he told Gandhi, "we do not stand in need of more agents"—the question now was one of expanding production. Gandhi agreed that "Our mills will not be in want of custom for a long time to come. My work should be...to organise the production of handspun cloth...through it I can provide work to the semistarved semiemployed women of India... At any rate it can do no harm. On the contrary to the extent it can add to the cloth production of the country, be it ever so small, it will represent so much solid gain..."
The millowner reiterated his scepticism, but declared that since Gandhi was thinking in terms of "additional production", "I for one wish you every success".

wealth and misery, class-conflict, the erosion of moral and aesthetic values in the rat-race for material success—and a search had begun for a peculiarly 'Indian' (or 'Asian') path which could preserve the virtues of traditional society even while solving the economic problems of the country. From 1898 onwards, the *Dawn* repeatedly warned against the uncritical transplantation of western industrialism;[55] as so often in our orientalist tradition, the testimony of Europeans —Annie Besant, Nivedita, Havell—was frequently cited in support of this rejection of Europe.[56] Much more startling is the reference to Engels's *The Condition of the Working Class in England in 1844* as evidence of the horrors of the industrial revolution, made in Satischandra Mukherji's extremely interesting article entitled "The Indian Economic Problem" (*Dawn*, March-June 1900).[57]

Satischandra felt that largescale industry produced two evils—exploitation by the capitalist minority, and "labour organisations on a gigantic scale... which would, as the days go by, be a serious political danger" (so much for

[55] *Dawn*, March 1898 (editor's note to an article by Annie Besant): July-August 1898 ("Aspects of Economic Life in England and India, Past and Present"—by the editor); October-December 1899 ("The Economic Situation in India and its Reaction on Indian Social Organisation"—editor); January 1900 ("Advanced Economic Thought in the West: How to Solve the Labour-Capital Problem"—editor).

[56] Annie Besant wrote a serial in the *Dawn* of 1897-98 entitled "Is Spiritual Progress Inconsistent with Material Progress?" Nivedita's connection with the Dawn Society is well-known. The *Dawn* of February 1902 carried an article by E. B. Havell calling for the development of skilled handicrafts rather than machines.

[57] "One has only to cast even a passing glance at the reports of the various commissions and blue books which investigated the state of industrial life in the factories, mines and workshops between 1833 and 1842; or to read the pages of Engels's *State of the Working Classes in England in 1844* to convince himself of the truth of the total degradation and suffering of the English working-classes brought on by the Industrial Revolution." *Dawn*, Volume III, p. 263. Bipan Chandra has already noted this early reference to the co-founder of Marxism—*op. cit.*, p. 391.

Engels, then!).[58] He visualised as a solution a kind of dual economy, with capitalist organisations only where these were absolutely indispensable (railways, mines, chemicals), while smallscale "individual family organisations" would be allowed and helped to flourish in all other sectors of the economy. Such a structure could be maintained in India "by giving material progress a place, but only a subordinate, though recognised, place in a progressive Hindu social organisation"—where wealth would be associated with social service, each class would have "a fixed, recognised and independent place in the social organism", and society would be regulated by what Satischandra liked to style a "higher culture".[59]

Such ideas became fairly common after 1905, perhaps largely because they could be easily integrated with the general current of Hindu revivalism. A *Bengalee* correspondent deplored the starting of large mills, since these would inevitably produce "antagonism between the wage-earner and the capitalist".[60] Men like Ranade had thought social reform a prerequisite for economic growth;[61] now in the swadeshi period it had become fashionable to point to caste traditions and prejudices as factors which had helped to preserve indigenous crafts.[62] One monthly in particular—the *Swadeshi*, edited by Jogindranath Chattopadhyay—came to embody the new attitudes most clearly. Strongly revivalist in tone, it repeatedly attacked western-style industrialisation, not sparing even the Banga Lakshmi project—"That the Serampore Mill has become the property of Bengalees is no doubt a matter for joy; but the less we have of textile mills,

[58] *Dawn*, op. cit., p. 232.
[59] *Ibid*, pp. 264-65.
[60] Letter of Kedarnath Roy—*Bengalee*, 19 October 1905.
[61] Bipan Chandra, *op. cit.*, p. 83.
[62] "... to preserve and encourage Indian crafts and industries, and so to help to solve the great poverty problem in India, we ought to grow more *national* in habits, more orthodox in our *tastes*"—Annodacharan Mitra, "How Hindu Orthodoxy Has Prevented from Dying and May Yet Revive Indian Arts and Industries"—*Dawn*, January 1902.

the better is it for the country."[63] "Machines enhance the suffering of the common people, and benefit only the rich handful. Independent professions are destroyed, labourers increase in numbers, become victims of drink and immorality, and are in time totally debased. Handicrafts provide food for everyone, preserve the freedom of all and produce worthy and religious men."[64] In politics this monthly was extremely moderate;[65] thus the new attitudes were no extremist monopoly.

It is tempting to see in such aspects of swadeshi thought evidence of a petty-bourgeois opposition to the growth of big capital, a kind of Indian variant in fact of the small-producers' utopia which has haunted European radical thought from Rousseau and the Jacobins through much of anarchism down to the Narodniks of Russia.[66] What is missing here, however, is the generous vision of human equality and brotherhood, the exaltation of physical labour and the agony of the intellectual alienated from that 'natural' life. The caste-ridden imagination of the neotraditionalist Hindu bhadralok found solace rather in the dream of a stratified society with provision explicitly made for the "maintenance or support of higher classes of workers devoted to the discovery or spread of truths"[67]—a Brahmin aristo-

[63] "Swadeshi andolaner phal", *Swadeshi*, Sravana 1313 (1906).
[64] Bireswar Pare, "Bartaman swadeshi andolan", *Ibid*, Phalgun 1313 (1906).
[65] Thus it condemned excesses by students, and—even after the Barisal conference—wanted to separate swadeshi from the political movement, "so that the government is not irritated"—*Swadeshi*, Phalgun 1312, Asar 1313 (1906).
[66] The Soviet historian N. M. Goldberg has drawn the Narodnik parallel in his analysis of extremism as a "petty-bourgeois democratic" movement—Reisner and Goldberg, *Tilak and the Struggle for Indian Freedom* (1966), pp. 34-36. Amales Tripathi also compares extremism with the Russian Slavophil movement—*op. cit.*, p. 18.
[67] Satischandra Mukherji, "The Indian Economic Problem"—*Dawn*, Volume III, p. 264. Rabindranath during his shortlived 'traditionalist' phase talked in similar terms of functional specialisation through the caste system, with Brahmins once again becoming disinterested intellectual leaders—*Brahman* (1902)—R.R. IV. The *Bande Mataram*

cracy of the intellect exempt as always from manual toil. Rejection of the West out of nationalist motives, rather than a genuine awareness of the evils of emergent industrial society or any passionate concern for that matter about the sufferings of the downtrodden in general—such seems to have been a dominant feature of swadeshi economic thought.

II. Swadeshi Enterprise

With the possible exception of Rammohun's friend Dwarkanath Tagore, Bengali entrepreneurs of the first half of the nineteenth century do not seem to have been inspired by any conscious nationalist sentiment. The traditional business castes, carrying on as modest compradores after the big names dropped out following the Union Bank fiasco, were also not distinguished by much patriotic consciouness —as not untypical examples may be cited the Shaha merchants of Barisal, dealers in foreign cloth who had to be subjected to intense 'social boycott' in the swadeshi days.[68] The Roys of Bhagyakul, who developed a flourishing trade in rice and jute during the last quarter of the century, and were the chief organisers of the Bengal National Chamber of Commerce in 1887,[69] actively campaigned against the partition in its earlier stages (allegedly because the development of Chittagong port would hurt their Hatkhola mart in Calcutta)[70]—but their connections with nationalism were otherwise extremely tenuous. Ideology likewise play-

combined democratic and even socialistic talk with frank praise of caste—which "had the true socialistic aim of keeping awake in every class of the society a sense of duty to it... they soften the keenness of the struggle for existence by a judicious and workable system of division of labour"—"Liberty and Our Social Laws" (editorial), 17 September 1907.

[68] Cf. below.

[69] *Bengal National Chamber of Commerce Souvenir Volume (1887-1962)*, p. 47.

[70] H. H. Risley's Note of 7 February 1904—Home Public Progs A, February 1905, n. 155.

ed little or no part in the timid and modest entry of Indian capital into tea plantations and coal mines.[71]

If swadeshi be defined as indigenous enterprise motivated primarily by conscious patriotism, its beginnings must be sought rather in the sporadic and often somewhat quixotic efforts of some members of two elite family-groups during the '70s and '80s of the last century. The Tagores of Jorasanko had become pure rentiers, so far as their stable income was concerned, after 1847, but patriotic considerations led several members of this unique family into swadeshi adventures. Dwijendranath and Ganendranath Tagore helped Nabagopal Mitra in starting the Chaitra or Hindu Mela in 1867, with exhibitions of indigenous crafts as one of its principal features.[72] In the mid-'70s the secret society called Sanjibani Sabha, started by Jyotirindranath Tagore with Rajnarayan Bose as president and teen-aged Rabindranath an enthusiastic member, tried to set up a match-workshop and a weaving concern. The matches refused to light and the loom expired after manufacturing a solitary towel.[73] After trying his hand for a short while with jute trading in Hatkhola (with Janakinath Ghoshal, the father of Sarala Debi and future Congress secretary, as partner) and indigo-cultivation at Shilaidaha, Jyotirindranath launched a major venture in 1884 with his Inland River Steam Navigation Service. Rabindranath has left an affectionate and moving account of what followed.[74] Five ships[75] were bought at enormous cost, to

[71] In 1895 there were 11 Indian-owned tea concerns—out of a total of 182 (Bengal National Chamber of Commerce, *op. cit.*, p. 35). Their number had gone up to 15—8 in Jalpaiguri and 7 in Silchar—by 1908 (G. N. Gupta, *op. cit.*). Indian enterprise was more prominent in coal, with 40 mines in Burdwan division and 62 in Chota Nagpur division in 1897—but most of these were small pits (Sunil Kumar Sen, *Studies...*, p. 34).

[72] *Sahitya-sadhak-charitmala*, Volume VI, Nos. 66, 71.

[73] *Ibid*, Volume VI, No. 68. Rabindranath, *Jiban-smriti* (Autobiography), pp. 110-16.

[74] *Jiban-smriti*, pp. 199-201. Cf. also *Sahitya-sadhak-charitmala*, *op. cit.*, and Monmothanath Ghosh, *Jyotirindranath* (1927), pp. 124-34.

[75] 'Sarojini', 'Bangalakshmi'; 'Swadeshi', 'Bharat', 'Lord Ripon'—

carry passengers between Khulna and Barisal and cargo up to Calcutta; but soon Jyotirindranath had to face a cut-throat competition from the Flotilla Company, a British-owned concern. Barisal students took up the cause of the swadeshi company with great enthusiasm, composing songs in its honour and recruiting passengers for it. But events proved—as they were to do so often later on—that patriotic sentiment among the intelligentsia was no substitute for solid capital resources. The rate-war led to passengers enjoying virtually free rides (with free meals to boot), an accident at the Howrah Bridge proved the final blow, and Jyotirindranath's shipping concern was ruined, Raja Peary Mukherji of Uttarpara buying up the assets as agent for the Flotilla Company.

Interest in business ventures was also displayed by some of the Young Brahmos—militant social reformers and the organisers of the Indian Association—and in particular by the group centring round Anandamohan Bose. Anandamohan bought a tea-plantation in Tezpur, and together with his father-in-law Bhagabanchandra Basu (the father of the scientist Jagadischandra) tried to set up a bank in the 1880s.[76] Surendranath Banerji, Anandamohan Bose and Narendranath Sen were honorary members of the Bengal National Chamber of Commerce from the year of its foundation, and the constitution of the chamber was drafted by Hume and revised by Wedderburn.[77]

By the last decade of the nineteenth century, economic swadeshi was shedding its sporadic character and gradually developing into something like a real movement. Here too 1905 obviously was a watershed, but the continuities are sufficiently clear to warrant us taking the twenty years from 1890 to 1910 as a single period. Five strands may be distinguished

four out of five names with clear nationalist connotations. *Sahitya-sadhak-charitmala, op. cit.*

[76] Krishnakumar Mitra, *Atmacharit* (1937), pp. 247-48. Cf. also Barun De, *Indian Nationalist Thought on Industrialisation before 1905* (paper read at a seminar on the National Council of Education at the Jadavpur University in 1967).

[77] Bengal National Chamber of Commerce, *op. cit.*, pp. 47, 73.

within the swadeshi economic activity of these two decades —organisation of technical education and something like industrial research; the promotion of swadeshi sales through exhibitions, shops and cost-price hawking by volunteers; the fostering and revival of the traditional indigenous crafts; the starting of new industries based on modern techniques (as well as one or two experiments in scientific agriculture); and the floating of swadeshi banks, insurance companies and inland shipping concerns.

The movement for technical education in Bengal had been inaugurated by Pramathanath Bose's pamphlet, published in 1886,[78] pleading for a proper science curriculum in the university syllabus, a separate Science and Technological Institute, and a 'Society for the Development of Indian Industries'. Technical education, Bose declared, was the essential prerequisite for the starting of what he termed the "science-industries"—textiles, dyeing, tannery, sugar-refining, soap and glass manufacturing, mining and metallurgy, etc.[79] Five years later Pramathanath presided over a meeting of the Bengal Provincial Conference delegates which set up an Indian Industrial Association.[80] The principal members of this Association were Pramathanath himself, pioneer geologist and son-in-law of R. C. Dutt, Parbatisankar Chaudhuri, the zamindar of Teota, and Trailokyanath Mukhopadhyay, a government official who published a number of monographs on the indigenous crafts of Bengal. The Association arranged popular lectures, as for instance, by Pramathanath Bose on the coal industry and Trailokyanath on fibres which could be prepared from certain Bengal plants. Its members

[78] *Technical and Scientific Education in Bengal* (October 1886). A description of this pamphlet is given in Jogesh Chandra Bagal, *op. cit.*, pp. 62-68.

[79] *Ibid*, p. 64.

[80] *Ibid*, pp. 68-69, Dinanath Gangopadhyay, "Bange swadesh-jata drabya byabaharer cheshta" (Efforts to Use Indigenous Articles in Bengal), *Nabyabharat*, Paus 1312 (1905). The Association was set up in October 1891 at a meeting at the British Indian Association office; Pramathanath became its first honorary secretary.

experimented with indigenous raw materials, with Parbatisankar trying to manufacture tar and ink from the peat deposits in his zamindari. It also organised exhibitions, till the Congress took up this work as a regular feature of its annual sessions from 1901.[81] The Association, however, seems to have become more or less inactive and unimportant by 1905, though there are a few references to formal annual meetings.[82] Its role as a forum for discussions on industrial matters was taken over by the Indian Industrial Conference, which became a regular feature of the annual Congress sessions from 1905 onwards.[83]

Much more important and successful than the 1891 society was the Association for the Advancement of Scientific and Industrial Education of Indians, founded in March 1904 by Jogendrachandra Ghosh, the lawyer-son of Justice Chandramadhab. The idea—apparently first suggested by Ramakanta Roy after his return from Japan[84]—was to raise a fund through donations and mass collections to provide scholarships for Indian youths going abroad for technical training. The original target was one lakh rupees a year, of which Rs 35,000 was to be spent on foreign scholarships, Rs 40,000 given as loans to the Indian experts returning from abroad to help them start new industries, and Rs 25,000 expended on a central laboratory for private college students in Calcutta.[85] The Association got the patronage of some Europeans—Sir

[81] The above account is based on Dinanath Gangopadhyay, *op. cit.*

[82] *Bengalee*, 27 March 1907, 22 January 1908.

[83] A total of 76 papers were presented to the Indian Industrial Conferences between 1905 and 1908. The resolutions adopted, however, were politically speaking uniformly moderate and even mendicant in outlook; the Conference, dominated by hardheaded Western Indian businessmen, never adequately reflected the more militant swadeshi spirit then sweeping Bengal. Cf. *Report of Indian Industrial Conference, 1905-1908.*

[84] *Weekly Chronicle*, 19 January 1904—RNP(B) for week ending 30 January 1904.

[85] Report by President Narendranath Sen to the Central Council of the Association, 10 February 1905. *Industrial India*, February 1905. The laboratory scheme, however, seems to have remained entirely on paper.

Daniel Hamilton provided several free passages through the British India Steam Navigation Company,[86] while lieutenant-governor Fraser attended a Town Hall send-off for the students going abroad[87]—and the office-bearers were mostly moderates of unimpeachable respectability.[88] At the same time the Association, particularly during its first years, counted among its most enthusiastic workers a number of young barristers who soon were to become prominent in the extremist movement—A. C. Banerji, A. K. Ghosh, B. M. Chatterji, C. R. Das, S. K. Mullick.[89] Particularly active during 1904 was A. C. Banerji, assistant secretary of the Association, addressing meetings in Dacca, Narayangunj and Midnapur in April, Ranaghat, Krishnagore and Comilla in June, and Nabadwip in August.[90]

In sharp contrast to the 1891 Association, never anything more than a small club of intellectuals with industrial inclinations, J. C. Ghosh's society with its four-anna mass membership soon caught the imagination of educated Bengal. Within a year, forty-eight district committees had been set up.[91] A contemporary diary records the decision of the school committee of a Vikrampur village "to raise the school-fee of each student by a farthing per mensem in aid of the newly-established Industrial and Scientific Association in Cal-

[86] *Acharya Prafulla Chandra Ray Birth Centenary Souvenir Volume* (1962), p. 71.

[87] *Bengalee*, 6 March 1906.

[88] Thus in 1904-5 the Association had Narendranath Sen as president, and Pearymohun Mukherji, Rashbehari Ghosh and Surendranath Banerji as vicepresidents. *Bengalee*, 14 July 1905. Jogendrachandra Ghosh himself got into hot water with the nationalists later on by standing for election to the Bengal Legislative Council during the boycott days—*Ibid*, 2 December 1906.

[89] Along with Bepin Pal and Bhubanmohan Sengupta, these were the men singled out for 'special thanks' by Narendranath Sen in February 1905 for having toured the districts on behalf of the Association *Industrial India*, February 1905.

[90] Press-cuttings from *Bengalee* and *Indian Mirror*, preserved among the *Private Papers of Aswinicoomar Banerji*.

[91] *Industrial India, loc. cit.*

cutta".[92] More than a thousand members and numerous village branches were reported from Barisal,[93] and there is an unexpected reference to the Association in an otherwise mendicant play about the partition.[94] An incidental effect of the movement was a relaxation in the orthodox ban on sea-voyages—in March 1906, 44 students going abroad on Association scholarships were actually given a reception at the Kalighat temple.[95] The society even got a promise of life long service from an unnamed "Bengalee sanyasi".[96]

In April 1908, the fifth annual meeting of the Association was informed that scholarships awarded annually during the four years of the society's life had numbered 17, 44, 96 and 79.[97] Of the 1906-7 scholarships, 48 were for the USA, 36 for Japan, 13 for Britain, and 2 for France;[98] the recipients included two Muslims, two Assamese and one each from Bihar and Orissa.[99] A number of industries were set up in course of time by students who had been trained abroad under Association scholarships. Satyasundar Deb became the principal architect of the Calcutta Pottery Works, A. P. Ghosh and P. C. Ray helped to

[92] Unpublished Diary of Gyanchandra Banerji, 29 October 1904.

[93] Sureshchandra Gupta, *Aswinikumar* (1928), pp. 220-22.

[94] Amarendranath Dutta, *Banger angacched ba—The Partition of Bengal* (August 1905), Scene I, pp. 2-3.

[95] *Bengalee*, 6 March 1906. Both A. C. Banerji and Narendranath Sen emphasised this happy link between industrial advancement and social reform—*Indian Mirror*, 4 August 1904; *Bengalee*, 2 April 1907.

[96] "The bearer of this letter is a Bengalee sanyasi who wishes to devote his life to the service of our Association. He is a man of business and keeps accounts well, having been in responsible posts on the EIR. He is a man of ideas also. Kindly consult with him about the mode of work and utilise him as much as you can..."—Jogendrachandra Ghosh to Aswinicoomar Banerji, Deoghar, 13 November 1904, *Private Papers of Aswinicoomar Banerji.*

[97] *Bengalee*, 14 April 1908.

[98] *Ibid*, 2 April 1907. Apparently three among those obtaining scholarships did not eventually make the trip—hence the discrepancy between the 1907 and 1908 reports.

[99] *Ibid.*

start a match factory,[100] K. C. Das and R. N. Sen founded the Calcutta Chemicals, S. M. Bose was associated with the Bengal Waterproof Company.[101] The Association during the swadeshi days also set up a Small Industries Development Company with a capital of two lakhs, and an agricultural estate at Deoghar.[102] Its work seems to have suffered, however, as politics of the new and exciting variety came to engross the attention of many of its earlier activists. The receipts for 1907-8 totalled only Rs 49,887, and J. C. Ghosh in a letter unfortunately undated complained bitterly to A. C. Banerji—"Now my health having broken down, unless some of you take up the work all is lost... Kindly try to collect the subscriptions for (sic) the pleaders and the barristers... This is the result of leaving everything to one man and enjoying yourself with tamashas, bonfires and speeches on swadeshi and all such futile nonsense."[103] Technical education in the meantime had of course been taken up in earnest by both the Bengal National College and the Bengal Technical Institute.[104]

The Hindu Mela tradition of holding periodic exhibitions of swadeshi products was revived by the Industrial Association from 1893 onwards, and its 1895 exhibition is said to have attracted 20,000 visitors.[105] After 1901, such displays became a regular part of Congress annual sessions. The 1906 Congress Exhibition was planned on a particularly ambitious scale, though its organiser Jogeshchandra Chaudhuri burnt his fingers badly by making Reuters its sole advertising agents and inviting Minto to open it.[106] Numerous local exhibitions

[100] *Ibid.*
[101] *Acharya P. C. Ray Centenery Volume*, p. 71.
[102] *Bengalee*, 5 August 1906, 14 April 1908. For more details, see below.
[103] *Private Papers of Aswinicoomar Banerji.*
[104] For the role of technical education in the National Education movement, see below, Chapter IV.
[105] Dinanath Gangopadhyay, *op. cit.*, *Nabyabharat*, Paus 1312 (1905).
[106] *Bengalee*, 16 December, 22 December 1906. The extremists called for a boycott of the exhibition, and the *Bande Mataram* of 2 March 1907 claimed that it closed after two and a half months with a deficit.

were also organised in the swadeshi days, as for instance the "Deshi Dhutie Hat" at Uttarpara set up by the "public spirited young zamindar" Rajendranath Mukherji in September 1905,[107] a mobile exhibition of everyday necessities of indigenous origin at Serampore in the same month,[108] and a swadeshi mela complete with a women's section organised by the Mojilpur-Jaynagar Hitaishini Sabha in March 1907.[109] The Mahila Silpa Samiti (Ladies' Industrial Society) founded by Hiranmoyee Debi organised 'Mahila Swadeshi Melas' in Calcutta in October 1906 and March 1908.[110] The annual swadeshi mela instituted by Krishnakumar Mitra and Sachindraprasad Basu on their return from exile, and kept up for a few years even after the abrogation of the partition, represented a kind of last flicker of the 1905 spirit in Bengal.[111]

Efforts to establish a regular swadeshi sales machinery—as distinct from occasional exhibitions—began in 1891 with a Swadeshi Emporium started by Nilambar Mukherji, Bireswar Chatterji, Akshoychandra Sarkar and the *Bangabasi* staff. This lasted for about a year, and is said to have obtained the support of Peary Mukherji of Uttarpara, Romeshchandra Mitter and Iswarchandra Vidyasagar. In 1897 Rabindranath set up a shortlived Swadeshi Bhandar at 82 Harrison Road.[112] In 1903 his niece Sarala Ghoshal founded the Lakṣhmir Bhaṇdar.[113] Apart from such amateur ventures, Calcutta had by 1905 two major concerns dealing with swadeshi goods (mainly mill-cloth from Bombay and Ahmedabad): Kunjabihari Sen's shop in Burrabazar, and the Indian Stores founded in 1902 and housed at 62 Bowbazar Street—the headquarters of

[107] *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 7 September 1905.
[108] *Bengalee*, 28 September 1905.
[109] *Swaraj*, 3 Chaitra 1313 (March 1907).
[110] *Bengalee*, 1 September 1906, 23 November 1906, 21 March 1908.
[111] Unpublished Diary of Sukumar Mitra, entries for 7-17 August 1911. *Sanjibani*, 5 Bhadra 1320 (1913).
[112] A description of these early swadeshi ventures is given in the Report on the Agitation against the Partition of Bengal, Government of Bengal to Government of India (Home), No. 205 B, 25 January 1906, paras 32-36—Home Public Progs A, June 1906, n. 175.
[113] *Dawn*, April 1903.

the Indian Association. The latter had a capital of five lakhs, divided into 5,000 shares; its secretary-cum-managing-director was Jogeschandra Chaudhuri, and the other directors included Surjyakanta Acharyya Chaudhuri, Manindra Nandi, Sitanath Roy, R. N. Mukherji and Bhupendranath Bose.[114] The Industrial Section of the Dawn Society, established by Kiranchandra Basu in June 1903, was supervised by J. Chaudhuri and K. B. Sen and functioned mainly as a retail agent (on an one-anna-per-rupee profit basis) for the two big concerns, selling about Rs 10,000 worth of home-made goods during its first year.[115] Among other indigenous trading concerns, established before 1905 and usually combining sale of imported articles with manufacture of one or two varieties of consumer goods, mention may be made of Buttokristo Paul (chemists), C. K. Sen and H. Bose (famous for their Jabakusum and Kuntalin hair-oils, the latter also importing phonograph records and cycles), and Carr and Mahalanobis (dealers in sports goods).

1905 brought a sudden expansion in the market, and new shops sprang up overnight—the United Bengal Company of the Muslim swadeshi leader Guznavi in Bowbazar,[116] Swadeshi Bazar on Cornwallis Street, Swadeshi Bastralay on Chitpur Road,[117] the Chhatra Bhandar of the revolutionaries, and very many others both in Calcutta and in district towns. K. B. Sen's sold eight months' stock in a fortnight;[118] the Indian Stores sales figures shot up by three lakh rupees compared to 1904, the proceeds in 1905 amounting to Rs 464,738-5-10 at the head office and Rs 97,680-3-0 for the Burrabazar branch. There was a profit of Rs 14,737-1-0, and a 6 per cent dividend was declared in August 1906—and all this despite the fact that, as J. Chaudhuri somewhat sanc-

[114] Prospectus of the Indian Stores—Enclosure J, Home Public Progs A, June 1906, n. 175.
[115] Haridas and Uma Mukherji, *Origins of the National Education Movement* (1957), pp. 283-88.
[116] Advertisement in *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 1 February 1906.
[117] *Swadeshi*, Kartik 1312 (1905).
[118] *Bengalee*, 20 August 1905.

timoniously declared, his firm had scrupulously refused to raise prices during the 1905 boom, selling dhuties at Rs 1-13 while elsewhere it had gone up to Rs 2-5.[119] Such abstinence, indeed, was extremely rare, and from as early as August 1905 nationalist newspapers had to frequently deplore profiteering in swadeshi—the forcing up of prices in the sellers' market created by the boycott, the sale of shoddy articles, even the palming-off of foreign goods with the trade marks removed as swadeshi.[120] In Calcutta the chief culprit was Kunjabihari Sen,[121] and in the districts, too, while Nivedita might optimistically call for the capture "of the small shops by the swadeshi",[122] a more practical-minded correspondent from Dinajpur had already pointed out that most of the mufassil swadeshi shops were not being started out of patriotic feelings alone.[123]

The nationalist movement sought to check the swadeshi profiteers through cost-price hawking by volunteers. The Anti-Circular Society set an example through its supply department, established on 9 December 1905, and many of the samitis tried to follow suit during the succeeding two or three years. Thus in May 1906 a correspondent of the *Bengalee* praised the work of the students of Bally, who had hawked Rs 700 worth of swadeshi goods at cost price in the course of a fortnight.[124] The accounts of the Anti-Circular Society's Supply Department (which had set up 75 branches in the mufassil) during its first year make interesting and impressive reading:

[119] *Ibid*, 1 September 1906.

[120] *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 29 August, 22 September 1905. *Bengalee*, 9 September, 21 September, 22 September, 23 September, 30 September 1905.

[121] *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 29 August 1905. Home Public Progs A, June 1906, n. 175, *op. cit.*

[122] Nivedita's article on the swadeshi movement in the *Indian Review*, reprinted in *Bengalee*, 4 April 1906.

[123] Lalitchandra Sen in *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 30 September 1905.

[124] *Bengalee*, 18 May 1906.

	Local Sale			*Mufassil*			*Total*		
	Rs	As	P	Rs	As	P	Rs	As	P
1905 December	1,446	13	3	1,018	13	3	2,465	10	6
1906 January	3,674	4	6	1,147	3	0	4,820	7	6
February	5,287	0	9	1,210	6	3	6,497	7	0
March	7,152	13	6	2,125	7	3	9,278	4	9
April	9,034	6	0	3,137	14	6	12,172	4	6
May	12,608	6	6	6,562	2	0	19,170	8	6
June	7,133	12	6	3,673	11	6	10,807	8	0
July	5,633	1	6	1,834	15	0	7,468	0	6
August	6,696	11	0	1,262	14	0	7,959	9	0
September	16,153	6	6	2,391	3	9	18,544	10	3
October	1,641	11	9	599	15	0	2,241	10	9
Grand Total :	76,457	7	9	24,964	9	6	1,01,422	1	3

The figures with their sharp ups and downs and obviously[125] close connection with the tempo of the general political movement (e.g. the dramatic rise after the Barisal conference of April 1906) indicate also the inevitably sporadic nature of such volunteer activity. What is more important, cost-price hawking could at best curb profiteering by retailers; the mill-owners of Bombay and Ahmedabad still went on making superprofits out of the patriotism of their fellow-countrymen. In the latter half of 1905, with the China and the home markets "in a particularly favourable condition", the working day in the Bombay mills was forced up for a time to a fantastic 15 hours.[126] The extent of exploitation may be gauged from a contemporary estimate of the profits of the Bombay industry at Rs 3.25 crores in 1906; the wage-bill for the same year came to only Rs 1.68 crores.[127] In 1906-7, when Japanese competition threatened the Chinese yarn market, the enhanced demand for piecegoods created by swa-

[125] Annual Report of the Anti-Circular Society, *Bengalee*, 10 November 1906.

[126] *Report of the Indian Factory Labour Commission* (1908), Vol. I, p. 7.

[127] *Dawn and Dawn Society's Magazine*, May 1908.

deshi helped to stave off a slump.[128] Occasional timid complaints by Bengal nationalists about the quality and price of Bombay and Ahmedabad cloth[129] were brushed aside. Ambalal Desai bluntly declared that high prices were inevitable, and "business and philanthropy make uncongenial friends".[130]

If swadeshi was to become a viable proposition in Bengal, the development of new productive capacity was the obvious prerequisite. This took two forms—the revival of traditional handicrafts, and the starting of modern industries.

Among handicrafts, cotton weaving naturally received the most attention. From 1902 onwards, E. B. Havell had been trying to popularise the fly-shuttle loom, invented by Kay a hundred and fifty years before but as yet in use in Bengal only in the Chandernagore and Serampore regions.[131] Numerous pamphlets were written on the subject in the swadeshi days—about a dozen during 1905-6.[132] The Bengal Landholders' Association planned to supply fly-shuttle looms to weavers,[133] and a number of schools were set up by the nationalists to teach bhadralok youths the art of handloom weaving. The National Fund trustees allocated Rs 10,000 to start a weaving school in December 1905 at the Sangit Samaj premises (209 Cornwallis Street) with 60 students and 21 fly-shuttle looms, and a further Rs 800 for the centre

[128] Sehangal, "The Triumph of Swadeshi, or the Story of the Textile Industry of India"—*Ibid*, July 1908. *Bengalee*, 5 April 1907.

[129] Thus the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* of 6 January 1906 stated that the 20,000 bales sold to Bengal by Ahmedabad were "of very inferior quality".

[130] "Economic Swadeshism—An Analysis"—*Modern Review*, February 1907. The role of the Bombay industrialists in the swadeshi days has been analysed in a recent article by A. P. Kannangara—"Indian Millowners and Indian Nationalism", *Past and Present*, No. 40 (July 1968).

[131] J. G. Cumming, *Review of the Industrial Position and Prospects in Bengal in 1908* (1908), pp. 8-10.

[132] *Bengal Library Catalogue of Books*, 1904-7.

[133] *Bengalee*, 10 September 1905.

established by Dr P. K. Acharyya at Kishoregunj.[134] Havell organised a training centre for the fly-shuttle at Serampore;[135] the Bande Mataram Sampraday had a school of its own at 121/1 Cornwallis Street and later at Talla;[136] and similar centres are reported from Mymensingh, Tangail (set up by Guznavi), Serajgunj, Barisal and Shilaidaha (established at Rabindranath's initiative).[137]

The net impact of these efforts was rather disappointing. The National Fund weaving school, Krishnakumar Mitra tells us, collapsed within a few months with a dead loss of Rs 30,000.[138] Bhadralok youths trained in such centres all too soon tended to lose interest in the matter, and the fly-shuttle was probably too expensive for the ordinary weaver —Cumming noted in 1908 that it was not much in evidence except in parts of Jessore, Howrah, Sadar and Serampore subdivisions of Hooghly, and the Ranigunj area.[139] But the new demand created by swadeshi did provide a very important stimulus to handloom weaving. Reported to be steadily declining in all previous surveys, "by 1906-07, the industry had recovered", and Cumming even speaks of "a revolution for the time being. . . made in the industry by the new factor of an increased local demand". A 50 per cent rise over the previous year was reported in 1906-7 from Burdwan district, an export trade from Bankura, and "considerable manufacture" at Bolpur in Birbhum district; in Arambagh subdivision of Hooghly production had risen "from 11 lakhs to 14 lakhs"; Ghatal was the main centre in Midnapore, Basirhat in the 24-Parganas; coarse cloths, bedsheets and towels were being

134 *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 10 February 1906.
135 Dakshina R. Ghosh, *The Industrial Guide* (1907), p. 57.
136 *Bengalee*, 1 March 1906. Unpublished Diary of Hemendraprasad Ghosh, entry dated 30 June 1906.
137 *Bengalee*, 20 October 1905, 21 November 1905, 6 March 1906. *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 12 December 1905, 6 February 1906.
138 Krishnakumar Mitra, *Atmacharit* (1937), pp. 258-59.
139 J. G. Cumming, *op. cit.*, p. 8. In East Bengal the fly-shuttle was to be found only in Barisal, Faridpur and Comilla—G. N. Gupta, *A Survey of the Industries and Resources of Eastern Bengal and Assam for 1907-08* (1908), p. 14.

made at Kushtia, Meherpur and Shikarpur in Nadia, and fine cloth for export at Santipur; and progress was being made also in Jessore and Khulna.[140] Similar reports came from East Bengal—"It looks, however, as if the downward course taken by this, the most important indigenous industry of the province, has at last been checked and a slow but perceptible improvement is visible everywhere."[141] The revival was most noticeable in Noakhali, Comilla (where the export figure mounted from a lakh to a lakh and a half rupees), Pabna and Faridpur districts.[142]

Yet if the achievements were considerable, certain major problems remained. Country cloth, admittedly somewhat more lasting than imported piecegoods, was still more than twice as expensive,[143] and there was also the factor of middlemen-cum-moneylender domination—"quite 75 per cent of the weavers are dependent on mahajans" and their earnings averaged less than Rs 8 a month.[144] "Enterprising shopkeepers and wholesale dealers in country-made cloth" consequently were the main beneficiaries from swadeshi, as for instance in the new province the firm of Saraswati and Co in Gauhati, and Saranath in Comilla. G. N. Gupta found little or no "marked improvement in the material condition of the weaver", and explained the rather surprising absence of Dacca from the list of districts where the handloom was advancing by "the fact that only one anna of the weavers of the Dacca town are free from the clutches of the mahajans".[145] It is interesting and significant that swadeshi made no attempt at

[140] J. G. Cumming, *op. cit.*, p. 7.
[141] G. N. Gupta, *op. cit.*, p. 9.
[142] *Ibid*, pp. 10-11.
[143] "The contrast is shortly as follows : Country cloth will last over a year, and imported cloth 7-8 months. The cost of the latter is Rs 0-11 to Rs 1-3, of the former Rs 1-12 to Rs 3-0." J. G. Cumming, *op. cit.*, pp. 7-8.
[144] Even the agricultural labourer got more—from Rs 8 to Rs 15. G. N. Gupta, *op. cit.*, p. 14.
[145] *Ibid*. Compare the views of J. G. Cumming—"The financiers of the cotton weavers are as a rule not master weavers and have not improved the craft in the slightest." *Op. cit.*, p. 11.

all to break this stranglehold on the artisans—we never hear of efforts to organise artisan cooperatives, for instance. There was also the further limitation that the yarn used by the Bengal weaver came from Bombay spinning mills and the finer counts often from Lancashire. Efforts to revive the charka as yet bore little fruit, though we do hear of one or two exhibitions of hand-spun yarn—as at Munshigunj in November 1906 and Barisal in March 1908.[146]

Swadeshi stimulated a partial revival in silk-weaving in its traditional centres of Murshidabad and Malda. Cumming noted that the silk-weavers, organised under influential headmen, were generally more prosperous than their mahajan-ridden brethren in the cotton industry.[147] The market for brass and bell-metal ware (with its main production centre in North Midnapur) expanded, swadeshi producing a sentiment among the bhadralok "that every Hindu who can afford it should purchase" such utensils in preference to imported enamelled goods; but the high price of copper was an adverse factor, and the cheaper foreign substitute remained popular among the poor.[148] The cutlery of Kanchannagore (Burdwan) found a ready market "in most swadeshi shops in Bengal", and there were other centres at Duttapara in Noakhali and Uzirpur in Barisal.[149] Use of swadeshi nibs became a point of honour, and not unoften a real test of patriotism, too, due to their atrocious quality.[150] The first two years of the movement saw such nibs being turned out in large quantities in Pabna, Patuakhali, Rangpur and Barisal, but by 1908 manufacture was reported only from Uzirpur in Bakargunj district.[151]

[146] *Bengalee*, 10 November 1906. *Daily Hitabadi*, 25 March 1908 (RNP (B) for week ending 28 March 1908).
[147] J. G. Cumming, *op. cit.*, p. 11; G. N. Gupta, *op. cit.*, p. 34.
[148] J. G. Cumming. *op. cit.*, pp. 6, 24.
[149] G. N. Gupta, *op. cit.*, p. 43.
[150] Thus a naib of the Gauripur estate in a letter to his employer from Sunamgunj described himself as writing "with great difficulty, with a bad, old and worn-out swadeshi nib". Home Political Progs A, February 1908, n. 102.
[151] G. N. Gupta, *op. cit.*, p. 44.

Among modern industries, the first and in many ways the most remarkable of all was the Bengal Chemical and Pharmaceutical Works, founded by the great scientist and patriot Prafullachandra Ray in 1893. Acharya Prafullachandra started with a small sulphuric acid plant bought from a fellow-villager in Sodepur (near Calcutta). The drugs produced from indigenous materials included Ayurvedic items as well as standard British pharmacopoeia preparations. Patriotic-minded distributors like Buttokristo Paul and doctors like Radhagobinda Kar and Nilratan Sircar helped to popularise the indigenous drugs and acids. The Sodepur plant was eventually scrapped, but in April 1901 Prafullachandra converted his business into a limited liability concern, and a few years later a proper factory was erected at 82 Maniktala Main Road, Rajshekhar Basu becoming the manager in 1904. The manufacture of laboratory apparatus and perfumes was also taken in hand. The company's sales rose from Rs 23,371 in 1901 to Rs 3 lakhs in 1910; the capital—originally two lakhs—had doubled by 1915. In 1908 Cumming hailed the enterprise as "an object lesson to capitalists in this province", but noted the high price of imported industrial alcohol to be a negative factor. The first world war provided a major new stimulus, and the number of workers employed, only 70 in 1908, had mounted to 1400 in 1926—by which time the Works had shifted to their present site at Panihati.[152]

Cumming mentioned "the manufacture of white porcelain from kaolin" at the Calcutta Pottery Works to be the only other really "good example in Calcutta of successful indigenous enterprise".[153] China-clay had been discovered in 1901 at Mangalhat near Rajmahal, and a private company to exploit it was started by Maharaja Manindra Nandi of Kassimbazar and Baikunthanath and Hemchandra Sen of Berhampore. The first efforts were unsuccessful, but the return of

[152] J. G. Cumming, *op. cit.*, p. 31. Prafullachandra Ray, *Life and Experiences of a Bengali Chemist* (1932), Volume I, Chapter VII. *Acharya P. C. Ray Birth Centenary Souvenir Volume* (1962), pp. 71-76.

[153] J. G. Cumming, *op. cit.*, pp. 5, 15.

Satyasundar Deb from Japan with training in ceramics in 1906 proved the turningpoint. A modern factory with up-to-date German and English machinery was set up at 45 Tangra Road, and soon the firm was advertising "swadeshi teacups, saucers, teapots, a real novelty"[154]—as well as inkpots, insulators and dolls, and even entering the foreign market.[155] The *Bengalee* of 12 October 1906 stated the capital of the Calcutta Pottery Works to be Rs 2 lakhs. "The chief thing", reported Cumming, "is that Mr Deb has succeeded in producing a glaze"—the traditional pottery in Bengal had been entirely of the plain unglazed terracotta variety.[156] Two Japanese experts helped to achieve further technical improvements during 1909-10, but the growing influx of cheap German and Japanese articles remained a serious problem.[157] There were two other ventures in kaolin in the swadeshi period which were much less successful—the Bengal Pottery Works at Baranagore under Satyacharan Bose with six inadequately trained workmen and a paid-up capital of only Rs 5,000, and the Eureka Porcelain Works of Giridih set up by M. N. Dutta and Justice Sharfuddin.[158] The latter had five Muslim and three Hindu directors.[159]

The swadeshi project launched with the greatest fanfare was of course the Banga Lakshmi Cotton Mills. The prospectus issued in the first months of 1906 called for a capital of Rs 12 lakhs to be raised through shares of Rs 100 each; the directors included a number of Bengal's leading zamindars and businessmen, and the appeal for subscriptions was backed up by the top nationalist politicians. A slight anticlimax was involved, however, in the fact that all that was being done was to purchase an existing plant—the Serampore Luxmi Tulsi Cotton Mills—from the Bombay industrialist Govar-

[154] Advertisement in *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 1 February 1906.
[155] J. G. Cumming, *op. cit.*, p. 15.
[156] *Ibid, loc. cit.*
[157] Prafullachandra Ray, *op. cit.*, Volume I, pp. 337-45.
[158] J. G. Cumming, *loc. cit.*
[159] "Growth of Swadeshi through Mahomedan Enterprise and Initiative" —*Dawn and Dawn Society's Magazine*, March 1910.

dhan Das Khatao for Rs 715,000.[160] Despite the publicity, the money came very tardily, one-third of the shares being still unsold in May,[161] and only a hectic campaign by Anti-Circular Society volunteers led by Gaurchandra Pal enabled the Bengal leaders to take over the mill from 1 August 1906.[162] Upendranath Sen, however, proved himself to be a capable managing director, despite unpopularity in some circles due to his close connections with Surendranath.[163] Banga Lakshmi had 26,000 spindles and 200 looms, was the only mill in Bengal weaving dhuties, and was able to declare a dividend of 5 per cent for the second half of 1907.[164]

Two years later, a second successful (though much smaller) venture was launched by Mohinimohan Chakrabarti, landholder and retired deputy magistrate. The Mohini Mills of Kushtia (Nadia district) had a capital of Rs 1½ lakhs divided into 6000 shares; the directors included Jagatkishore Acharyya Chaudhuri of Muktagaccha and Rabindranath

160 The list of directors included Surjyakanta Acharyya, Manindra Nandi, Sitanath Roy, Abdus Sobhan Chowdhuri and Nalinbihari Sirkar; R. N. Mukherji of Martin and Company; and Upendranath Sen who became the managing director. The appeal for subscriptions was signed by Peary Mukherji, Baikunthanath Sen, Ambicacharan Majumdar, Anandachandra Roy, Anathbandhu Guha, Aswinikumar Dutta, Abdul Rasul, Langut Singh, Guznavi, Narendranath Sen, Motilal Ghosh, Surendranath Banerji, Asutosh Chaudhuri and Bhupendranath Bose. *Bengalee,* 20 January and 6 March 1906.

161 The *Bengalee* admitted this on 16 May 1906, and drew attention to the fact that Rs 6 lakh worth of shares of a new European mill had been sold within a week.

162 *Bengalee,* 30 May, 4 August 1906. But even as late as 17 August the new management was having to appeal repeatedly to shareholders for payment of their dues. *Ibid,* 17 August 1906.

163 Thus at the stormy meeting of 10 July 1906 at the British Indian Association Hall to elect the Congress Reception Committee, Chittaranjan Das charged that Surendranath "had already burdened the Lakshmi Cotton Mills with one of his proteges". Bengal Police Abstract No. 29, 21 July 1906—Home Public Progs Deposit, September 1906, n. 5 (Enclosure J).

164 J. G. Cumming, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

Tagore.[165] The Calcutta Weaving Company started a small mill with 50 looms in a Howrah suburb on a capital of Rs 30,000.[166] In East Bengal the Tripura Company which had been floated in 1906 started a cotton ginning factory at Chittagong in December 1907.[167] In the same month production commenced at the Jalpaiguri Pioneer Weaving Mill, a small (nominal capital Rs 50,000) and not particularly successful swadeshi venture in the new province.[168] Muslim landlords (Abdus Sobhan of Bogra and A. H. Guznavi of Tangail) took the initiative in starting the Bengal Hosiery Company in 1908 with a capital of Rs 2 lakhs; like the Banga Lakshmi, this contented itself with taking over and expanding the works of an old Kidderpore hosiery.[169] The Pabna Silpa Sanjibani Company, started in 1905, produced hosiery, knitted cotton and silk banians.[170] So much for the textile schemes which actually got off the ground; the contemporary press bears witness to a far larger number of plans and companies which remained in the end merely on paper.[171] The most notorious of these was the Indian Spinning and Weaving Company, floated in 1906 with a very ambitious target of Rs 12 lakh share capital, which collapsed early next year in a welter of litigation and scandal.[172] The total production of weaving mills in Bengal was 5.8 million yards in 1906-7 and

[165] *Bengalee*, 28 April, 2 May, and 28 October 1908. Sunil K. Sen. *Economic Enterprise—Studies in the Bengal Renaissance*, p. 549.

[166] *Bengalee*, 20 February 1907; *Bande Mataram*, 27 February 1907.

[167] *Prabasi*, Kartik 1313 (1906); *Bengalee*, 11 December 1906, 14 December 1907; G. N. Gupta, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

[168] G. N. Gupta, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

[169] *Bengalee*, 16 January, 6 February, 4 December 1908. Sunil K. Sen, *op. cit.*, p. 551. J. G. Cumming, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

[170] Udayan Chatterji, *Swadeshi Industries in Bengal 1905-1947*, p. 5. (Paper read at a Seminar on the National Council of Education at the Jadavpur University in 1967.)

[171] Cf. e.g. *Prabasi*, Kartik 1313 and *Bengalee*, 12 October and 4 November 1906 for a number of projects which were never realised.

[172] *Bengalee*, 4 October 1906, 9 January and 9 April 1907. Home Public Progs Deposit, September 1906, n. 5 (Enclosure C). Home Public Progs A, April 1907, n. 207.

7.9 million yards the following year; how far the province still was from selfsufficiency may be gauged from the fact that the import of piecegoods from all sources into Calcutta in the same two years amounted to 1160 million and 1330 million yards respectively.[173]

The swadeshi period was marked by several notable efforts to introduce the new technique of chrome tanning into the leather industry of Bengal. The Nadia zamindar Biprodas Pal Chaudhuri started a small factory at Maheshgunj, with Sisir Bose who had been trained by Chatterton as manager, and with a shop in Calcutta at Mirzapur Street. Dr Nilratan Sircar founded the National Tannery in the Calcutta suburb of Beliaghata in 1905, with a retail shop on Harrison Road. He had as his assistants Surendranath Roy and (between 1914 and 1919) the leather technologist Birajmohan Das.[174] The new techniques introduced by the patriotic doctor seem to have benefited mainly the Chinese cobblers of the city, though the National Tannery did survive somehow as a struggling concern, and was revived in 1941 by his industrialist son-in-law Sudhirkumar Sen.[175] There was also the Utkal Tannery of Cuttack, founded by Madhusudhan Das, the pioneer of Oriya nationalism. In January 1908 Pal Chaudhuri, Sircar and Das joined hands with Pandit Mohan Krishna Dhar of Agra to form a Boot and Equipment Factory Company with plans to expand the Agra Stewart Factory started by the latter; the target was a capital of rupees five lakhs divided into 20,000 shares.[176]

A considerable number of small and medium sized consumer goods industries sprang up in the wake of the swadeshi movement. Dr Nilratan Sircar started the National Soap Factory at 92 Upper Circular Road with Carr and Mahalanobis

[173] J. G. Cumming *op. cit.*, p. 7.

[174] 'Biswakarma', 'Lakshmir kripalabh—bangalir sadhana' (The Bengalis' Quest for Business Success), *Desh*, 25 May 1968.

[175] J. G. Cumming, pp. 19-21. Moni Bagchi, *Sudhirkumar Sen—Jivancharit* (1964), pp. 114-18.

[176] J. G. Cumming. *loc. cit.*, *Bengalee*, 5 January, 11 January 1908.

as the managing agents.[177] Other successful ventures in the same field were the Bengal Soap Company (54/1 Mechhua-bazar Street) and the Oriental Soap Factory at Goabagan in Calcutta, and the Boolbool Soap Factory at Gandaria in Dacca run by a manager trained in Tokyo.[178] Swadeshi soap tended to be highly scented and coloured and extremely variable in quality; a contemporary analysis found that while the best European product contained 93 per cent of pure soap, the corresponding figures for six varieties of its indigenous substitute varied from 66 per cent to 91 per cent.[179] In January 1907, the moderate leader Rashbehari Ghosh started the Bande Mataram Match Factory at 38 Russa Road, with P. C. Ray and A. P. Ghosh, technicians trained in Japan, as his assistants.[180] The Oriental Match Manufacturing Company floated in July 1906 included among its directors Peary Mukherji and P. Mitter; the projected capital of one lakh rupees took a very long time to raise, but eventually production was started at Konnagore in 1909.[181] A smallscale match-making industry also sprang up at Narail, in Jessore district.[182] Cheap swadeshi cigarettes (ten for a pice) were turned out in Calcutta by the Globe Cigarette Company (20 Tangra Road), the East India Cigarette Company (17 Beliaghata Road), and the Bengal Cigarette Manufacturing Company (42 Shampukur Street), while in East Bengal the Rangpur Tobacco Company was started in 1907 with one-lakh-rupee capital, and machinery purchased from a Bombay firm; among the directors were Pramathanath Bose, Jogendrachandra Ghosh, Biprodas Pal Chaudhuri, three zamindars, three pleaders and a merchant.[183] The big factory near Monghyr

[177] *Bengalee*, 5 October 1906, *Bande Mataram*, 6 July 1907.
[178] J. G. Cumming, *op. cit.*, p. 34. G. N. Gupta, *op. cit.*, p. 94.
[179] J. G. Cumming, *loc. cit.*
[180] *Ibid*, p. 33. *Bande Mataram*, 23 July 1907.
[181] *Bengalee*, 13 July 1906, 5 April 1907, 8 January 1908. "Bengal Swadeshi: A Revival of Industries and Commerce"—*Dawn and Dawn Society's Magazine*, May 1909. [182] *Bengalee*, 2 February 1907.
[183] J. G. Cumming, *op. cit.*, p. 43. G. N. Gupta, *op. cit.*, p. 73. *Bengalee*, 16 December 1907.

started in May 1908 by the Peninsular Tobacco Company (an Anglo-American syndicate) represented an interesting attempt by foreign capital to take advantage of the new market situation created by swadeshi.[184] The Small Industries Development Company started in 1906 by Jogendrachandra Ghosh's Association (with a capital of two lakh rupees raised through Rs 10 shares) set up the Bengal Button Factory at 130 Bagmari Road, as well as a unit for manufacturing lead pencils. Indians trained in Japan were placed in charge of these plants. Ink-manufacture was another field where good progress was being made, particularly by J. P. Bose who had learnt the art in Japan.[185] Paper mills had been established before 1905 at Titagarh, Kankinara and Ranigunj, and the Maharaja of Mayurbhanj planned to set up a big modern plant at Baripada.[186] The Monorama Candle Factory started in 1907 at Dinajpur by another Japanese-trained expert (Nagendranath Majumdar), and the National Oil Mill at Nalchiti in Barisal, represented two successful swadeshi ventures in industrially-backward East Bengal.[187] The old sugar works at Tarpur in Jessore was reopened in 1906.[188]

Nothing reveals the limitations of economic swadeshi in Bengal more clearly than the very meagre efforts and achievements in the vital field of engineering. The Sibpur Iron Works started in 1867 was still functioning;[189] Das and Company began manufacturing iron-safes at Chitpur; the Arya Factory set up at Mechhuabazar specialised in steel trunks;[190] and in May 1907 the collector of customs reported that there was "a new industry springing up in the manufacture of buckets, of which large quantities have hitherto been imported

[184] J. G. Cumming, *loc. cit.*
[185] *Bengalee*, 5 August 1906, 23 February 1908. J. G. Cumming, *op. cit.*, p. 33. *Dawn and Dawn Society's Magazine*, May 1909, *op. cit.*
[186] J. G. Cumming, *op. cit.*, pp. 33-34.
[187] *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 18 November 1907. *Bengalee*, 14 March 1908. *Dawn and Dawn Society's Magazine*, May 1908—"Swadeshi Notes".
[188] *Bengalee*, 14 March 1906.
[189] Advertisement in *Bengalee*, 3 July 1906.
[190] J. G. Cumming, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

annually".[191] But for raw materials such industries had to depend on imported iron and steel, and one of the first results of swadeshi was paradoxically enough an increase in the import of machinery from England.[192] In August 1907 the prospectus of the National Cycle and Motor Company, after stating its objective to be the starting of "a new industry" in India, admitted that for the present only importing and repairing of cycles would be undertaken.[193] Sudhirkumar Sen, the founder of Bengal's cycle industry after independence, started in a similarly modest manner with an import business (Sen and Pandit) in 1910.[194] The one major exception to this neglect of basic industries was of course Tata Iron and Steel, which began with an initial capital of nearly Rs 2.5 crores raised in a spate of swadeshi enthusiasm in Bombay within three weeks of the publication of the prospectus on 27 August 1907. Though the initiative and the capital came entirely from the western province, it was Pramathanath Bose who had discovered and drawn the attention of the Tatas to the magnificent iron ore deposits of Gurumahishini, with the result that the site of the plant was shifted from the Central Provinces to Sakchi in Bihar (then within Bengal), the Jamshedpur of today.[195] But despite this example, when swadeshi publicists in Bengal criticised the frittering away of resources in the production of nonessential consumer goods, the alternative they generally suggested was not the building-up of basic industries, but the reduction of western-style wants through a reassertion of indigenous taste and the revival of ascetic habits.[196]

By 1907-8, the emphasis in swadeshi efforts was shifting

[191] Fortnightly Report from Bengal, No. 1033 P.D., 25 May 1907, para 4—Home Public Progs A, June 1907, n. 220.

[192] *Report on the Maritime Trade of Bengal, 1907-1908*, p. ix.

[193] *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 10 October 1907. The prospectus is dated 15 August 1907.

[194] Moni Bagchi, *op. cit.*, Chapter IV.

[195] F. R. Harris, *J. N. Tata* (1958), pp. 179-91. Jogeshchandra Bagal, *Pramathanath Bose* (1955), pp. 71-88.

[196] Cf., for instance, the distinction between 'commercial' and 'people's' swadeshi in *Dawn and Dawn Society's Magazine*, March 1909. By 1915,

away from industrial production towards banking, insurance and inland trade, where profits seemed much easier to make and capital was correspondingly less shy. The Bengal National Bank opened in April 1908 had a capital target of Rs 50 lakhs; its directors included the Maharaja of Darbhanga, Surjyakanta Acharyya, the Bhagyakul Roy family (described in the prospectus as 'bankers and zamindars'), and R. N. Mukherji of Martin and Company.[197] The second swadeshi bank, the Cooperative Hindusthan, was even more ambitious, with an authorised share capital of Rs 2 crores. Its patrons and directors included the Maharajas of Cooch-Behar, Kassimbazar and Natore, and nationalist leaders Asutosh Chaudhuri and Aswini Dutta.[198] Neither proved particularly successful or long-lived. The swadeshi era, however, produced in Ambicacharan Ukil of Dacca a talented and dedicated organiser of cooperative ventures in banking and insurance.[199] The National Insurance Company was floated in November 1906 with a capital target of Rs 10 lakhs; it was followed by the Eastern Life Insurance, the India Equitable Life Insurance and the Hindusthan Cooperative Insurance. The latter had Surendranath Tagore as secretary and Brojendrakishore Raychaudhuri as treasurer, and, together with its off-shoot the Hindusthan Central Cooperative Bureau (managed by Premtosh Bose), was suspected by the police to have secret dealings with the revolutionary movement.[200] In July 1905, Muslim merchants and

even Pramathanath Bose seems to have largely lost faith in the prospects of modern industry in India; he had started talking instead of achieving economic selfsufficiency through a negative method of self-imposed abstinence. The resemblance with some aspects of Gandhian economics is striking—Jogeshchandra Bagal, *op. cit.*, pp. 111-13.

[197] *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 4 October 1907. *Bengalee*, 14 April 1908.

[198] *Bengalee*, 1 August 1908. *Dawn and Dawn Society's Magazine*, May 1908, *op. cit.*

[199] Haridas Mukhopadhyay, *Benoy Sarkarer Baithake* (1942), pp. 302-3, 452.

[200] *Bengalee*, 29 November 1906, 6 February 1908. *Dawn and Dawn Society's Magazine*, *op. cit.*, Sunil K. Sen, *op. cit.*, p. 550. Home Political Progs A, March 1910, n. 36.

zamindars of Chittagong started the Bengal Steam Navigation Company with a capital of Rs 1 lakh and Munshi Mahomed Kalamtian as managing director. The company successfully ran a passenger service between Chittagong, Akyab and Rangoon despite stiff competition from two foreign concerns, and was able to give a dividend of 7½ per cent by 1909.[201] The East Bengal River Steam Service founded by the Roys of Bhagyakul in 1897[202] was greatly expanded after 1906; by 1908 it had a workshop and dock at Cossipur and was paying a dividend of 12 per cent.[203] The Roys also started the East Bengal Mahajan Flotilla Company in 1908 with a capital of Rs 15 lakhs, and in the same year leading zamindars like Manindra Nandi, Surjyakanta Acharyya and Brojendrakishore Raychaudhuri joined hands with Rasul and Aswini Dutta to start the Cooperative Navigation Ltd.[204] But none of these survived for long in the face of the ruthless rate-war started by English shipping lines and the refusal by the jute mills to accept the cargo carried by the Indian concerns. No less than twenty Indian shipping companies with an aggregate capital of Rs 10 crores failed in this manner between 1905 and 1930.[205]

While industry and commerce engrossed most of the attention of swadeshi enthusiasts, a few little-known projects for agricultural development deserve a passing mention. J. C. Ghosh's Association had planned in August 1905 an Agricultural Settlement to be set up on 45,000 bighas of land purchased near Deoghar, the intention being to provide a training-ground for scientific agriculture as well as a "plea-

[201] *Bengalee*, 11 March 1906, 13 November 1906. *Dawn and Dawn Society's Magazine*, April 1908, May 1909.
[202] *Bengal National Chamber of Commerce Souvenir Volume 1887-1962*. Particulars of Current Members.
[203] *Dawn and Dawn Society's Magazine*, February 1908, May 1909.
[204] *Dawn and Dawn Society's Magazine*, October 1908, May 1909. Sunil K. Sen, *op. cit.*, p. 550.
[205] Testimony of Jogendranath Roy of the East Bengal River Steam Service Company before the Mercantile Marine Committee—quoted in *Acharyya P. C. Ray Birth Centenary Souvenir Volume*, pp. 78-79.

sant retirement spot for leisured health-seekers". After many vicissitudes, the settlement opened more modestly in March 1908 with a training-school for fifteen 'sons of gentlemen'.[206] In June 1906, an Indian Cotton Cultivation Company was registered with the intention of starting a cotton farm at Maluti (Santal Parganas) to feed the Banga Lakshmi Mill. The capital target of Rs 10,000 proved very difficult to attain, and when in the summer of 1907 a hundred bighas were sown with cotton, seven-eighths of the crop was ruined by drought.[207] A third scheme—for a thousand-bigha horticultural and dairy farm near Kanchrapara[208] apparently never materialised, though by an interesting coincidence the Haringhata State Dairy Farm was to be set up after independence at a site very close to the one selected in 1907.

A sense of anticlimax is difficult to avoid in any survey of swadeshi business achievements. A string of consumer goods industries of dubious stability, plus a few banks and trading and insurance firms—the sum-total hardly amounted to that industrial rejuvenation dreamt of at the beginning of the movement; and the strongholds of British capital in jute, tea and coal remained entirely unaffected. Yet perhaps the failure was largely inevitable—as Pramathanath Bose had pointed out as early as May 1903, "Without capital to speak of, without higher technical education worth the name, and without protection in any form, Young India is more to be pitied than censured for its lack of industrial enterprise".[209] Indians displayed considerable initiative and aptitude in starting virtually from scratch industries like chemicals, ceramics and chrome tanning, and learning from Japan and other countries—lack of technical knowhow was clearly not the crucial limitation. Boycott gave protection of a sort for some time, though it also imparted a consumer-goods bias to the entire movement, since basic industries like steel or

[206] *Bengalee*, 30 August 1905, 18 October 1906, 7 March 1908.
[207] *Ibid*, 23 January 1907, 18 April 1907, 8 May 1908.
[208] *Ibid*, 26 March 1907, 23 April 1907.
[209] "A Plea for a Patriotic Movement", *National Magazine*, May 1903. Quoted in J. C. Bagal, *op. cit.*, pp. 89-90.

engineering depended for their markets mainly on government orders.[210] Though the authorities in theory favoured "honest swadeshi", in Bengal Indian entrepreneurs got "little help or guidance",[211] the government contenting itself with district exhibitions, publication of monographs on industrial subjects and the establishment of a central weaving school at Serampore in 1909.[212] The Bengal service never produced a Chatterton—and even the efforts of that very enterprising Madras civilian had been obstructed by Morley and benefited in the end mainly European private business.[213]

Lack of capital proved an even more serious limiting factor. Zamindars and established businessmen interested in industrial ventures were relatively few in number (it is noteworthy how the same names recur time and again in the lists of swadeshi patrons and directors—Kassimbazar, Gauripur, Muktagaccha, Bhagyakul), and the type of the swadeshi entrepreneur was rather a man like Dr Nilratan Sircar, a kind of latter-day Jyotirindranath, spending his professional savings with an utterly liberal if quixotic hand in scheme after dubious scheme. The one really successful Bengali businessman of the period—Rajendranath Mukherji—built his fortune only through collaboration with Acquin Martin.[214] As J. G. Cumming pointed out in the best contemporary analysis

[210] Tata Iron and Steel was greatly helped in its early days by a standing order of 20,000 tons of steel per year for ten years; the government also constructed for it a railway line from Kalimathi (the present Tatanagar) to Gurumahishini—J. G. Cumming, *op. cit.*, p. 23; F. R. Harris, *op. cit.*, p. 192.

[211] *Bengal District Administration Committee Report, 1913-14*, p. 176.

[212] J. G. Cumming, *op. cit.*, p. 46. *Hooghly District Gazetteer* (1912), p. 184.

[213] From 1898 Alfred Chatterton had tried to start in Madras pioneer state factories in aluminium, chrome tanning and weaving, and the first provincial department of industries had been set up in 1906. Lord Morley's Despatch of 29 July 1910 abruptly halted such positive state efforts, and the aluminium ware enterprise was eventually handed over to Eardly Norton—*Report of the Indian Industrial Commission 1916-18*. Appendix J; Sunil K. Sen, *Studies in Industrial Policy and Development of India* (1964), pp. 130-34.

[214] K. C. Mahindra, *Rajendranath Mukherji* (1933, 1962), pp. 103-13.

of economic swadeshi—"...the capital for these new enterprises is not coming from the large capitalists, but from the savings of the middle class. It is the opinion of a leading native merchant that it is much easier to make money by an agency in imported goods than by investment in industrial enterprise. The large capitalist has still to be persuaded that he can get a good return for his money in manufacture, rather than in zamindari, or agency, or moneylending."[215]

Contemporaries thus tended to attribute Bengal's lag in indigenous industrial development to the prospect of quick profits in trade and to the lure of land created by the permanent settlement—"One of the reasons why the Western Presidency has got an aristocracy of merchants is that it has not got an aristocracy of zamindars."[216] British managing agency, however, combined successful trade with industrial enterprise, while their Bengali counterparts tended to fail in both. Again, Pramathanath Bose was possibly underestimating the degree of convergence produced over time between the zamindari and the ryotwari land tenure systems; the second hypothesis in any case demands a more detailed study of income, expenditure and profitability patterns than is presently available. On the whole, in the words of a very perceptive recent analysis, "the simpler explanation is that entry into modern industry was barred by European control over foreign trade, wholesale trade, and finance".[217] The well-entrenched foreign domination over the 'commanding heights' of Bengal's economy thus set severe limits to the realisation of patriotic dreams.

[215] J. G. Cumming, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

[216] Pramathanath Bose, Lecture delivered at the Bengal Technical Institute, 1 August 1906—*Bengalee*, 2 August 1906.

[217] Amiya Kumar Bagchi, *op. cit.*—in Leach and Mukherji, *op. cit.*, p. 241. It will be evident that this concluding paragraph is heavily indebted to Dr Bagchi's article.

III. The Impact of the Boycott

The boycott slogan united virtually all sections of nationalist opinion in Bengal during the swadeshi days, and it is also the one aspect of the movement where something like a quantitative assessment is feasible.

The *Annual Reports on the Maritime Trade of Bengal* give us the statistics of the value in rupees of imports into the province from 1900 to 1912 (see pages 138 & 139).

A wholesale boycott of English goods was obviously never practical politics; the development of swadeshi industries in fact stimulated the import of machinery[218] and even of certain varieties of cotton yarn.[219] Even the *Bande Mataram* favoured no more than a 'graduated boycott', with Manchester piecegoods, Liverpool salt and foreign sugar as the principal targets[220] to which might be added footwear, cigarettes, enamalled goods and foreign liquor. The statistics (Table I) indicate that the boycott of sugar was a total flop, while the impact on most other imports was never more than marginal if we take the period as a whole. However, sharp dips are noticeable in cotton goods, apparel, tobacco and liquor

[218] "The greatest increase was in cotton mill machinery, the value rising by nearly 6 lakhs", and there were imports also of "a small cigarette manufacturing plant, a small pottery making plant, match making machinery, glass manufacturing machinery... Handpower knitting machines continued to arrive in considerable quantities." 97 per cent of imports of machinery came from the UK—*Report on the Maritime Trade of Bengal*, 1906-07, p. ix.

[219] The growing demand for hosiery yarns led to an increase during 1906-8 of imports of the counts 16s-30s; while "counts above 50s also show an increase which may be the result of the handloom weavers turning their attention more to the manufacture of fine cloths in anticipation of any 'swadeshi' demand". Yarn of the medium 31s-40s counts fell off, however, and there was a 30 per cent drop in the total volume of imported cotton twist and yarn. *Ibid*, pp. vi-vii.

[220] "Graduated Boycott", *Bande Mataram*, 26 April 1907. Haridas and Uma Mukherji, *Sri Aurobindo and the New Though in Indian Politics*, pp. 45-46.

TABLE

	1900-1	1901-2	1902-3	1903-4	1904-5
1. Cotton goods (Rs)	15,90.48	15,96.86 (+0.04 %)	16,03.35 (+0.04 %)	15,59.68 (—2.7 %)	28,66.08 (+19.6 %)
Twist & yarn (lb)	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	69.14	79.19
Piecegoods (yds)	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	111,80.17	122,16.33
2. Woollen goods (Rs)	86.78	70.92	50.50	71.52	98.29
3. Sugar (Rs)	1,59.85	1,64.76	1,48.35	1,83.89	2,09.52
4. Salt (Rs)	44.24	65.04	49.31	52.13	55.94
5. Hardware & cutlery (Rs)	77.39	66.03	76.78	81.53	88.02
6. Apparel (including boots & shoes) (Rs)	44.60	46.23	47.82	47.81	57.10
7. Liquor (Rs)	44.88	47.66	53.77	49.66	48.07
8. Tobacco (Rs)	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	23.93	28.76
Cigarettes (Nos)	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	58.40
9. Matches (Rs)	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
10. Glass & glassware (Rs)	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
11. Earthen ware & porcelain (Rs)	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
12. Soap (Rs)	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.

Notes: 1. All values given in lakhs (i.e. 15,90.48=15 crores 90 lakhs 48 thousand or 15,90,48.000)
2. n.a.=Not Available.
3. % variations in the value of cotton goods over the preceding year has been indicated in parentheses.

I

1905-6	1906-7	1907-8	1908-9	1909-10	1910-11	1911-12
21,44.56 (+14.9 %)	18,62.80 (—13 %)	23,73.10 (+27 %)	16,20.81 (—32 %)	20,20.80 (+24.7 %)	20,53.87 (+2 %)	22,73.92 (+11) %)
1,48.09	1,03.99	1,19.32	93.65	1,05.55	86.66	1,17.43
133,59.54	116,025.11	133,049.93	97,81.41	125,54.18	113,93.94	123,79.85
64.18	44.71	69.15	77.22	52.67	75.45	88.60
2,53.18	3,34.79	3,78.04	4,61.61	5,02.23	5,91.95	5,23.61
53.30	52.82	62.80	67.25	52.27	53.38	64.81
75.09	87.63	1,11.42	96.41	98.86	1,10.07	1,26.19
51.22	42.84	55.81	53.74	55.02	66.85	80.07
54.35	50.39	59.08	56.95	59.79	59.11	62.38
32.75	31.22	36.63	32.41	40.79	21.69	23.44
66,60	56,30	61,30	47,10	43,90	15,50	12,80
n.a	n.a	21.79	19.85	23.12	22.67	26.29
n.a	n.a	39.16	37.26	39.80	47.84	49.83
n.a	n.a	16.64	13.03	14.78	14.82	16.79
n.a	n.a	8.07	8.06	9.04	11.38	13.44

4. The volume, as distinct from value, of imports is unfortunately not generally available as a continuous series in the reports. Such series are available only for cotton twist and yarn (in lb), cotton piecegoods (in yards) and cigarettes (in number).

for the years 1906-7 and 1908-9, while the fall in the import of cigarettes proved to be a permanent trend.

But annual import figures alone do not offer a reliable index for the impact of the boycott on the actual sale of foreign commodities. Three sets of factors need to be taken into consideration here.

There was first the question of accumulation of stocks; trade figures could be no more than "a very partial guide"[221] since goods imported by merchants on the basis of their expectation of the demand "may be rotting in godowns, unsold and unsaleable".[222] This would of course tend to

TABLE II[223]

(Average for the 5 years 1901-5=100)

Year ending 31.8	Stocks					Ratio	
	Arrivals	*Deliveries*	*Sold*	*Unsold*	*Total*	*of stocks to arrivals*	*of unsold to total stock*
1901	87.4	85.5	94.3	144.8	103.5	34.5	25.5
1902	101.9	100.3	103.0	114.5	105.1	30	19.8
1903	104.2	105.1	102.8	85.1	99.5	27.8	15.6
1904	98.4	99.6	97.7	94.8	97.2	28.7	17.8
1905	108.2	109.4	102.2	60.8	94.7	25.5	11.7
1906	117.8	107.7	110.5	235.7	137.3	34.0	31.2
Actual Figure Average for 1901-5 (in bales)	169,729	169,049	40,399	8,994	49,394		
1906	199,886	182,038	46,740	21,200	67,904		

[221] Confidential Report on the Effect of the Swadeshi Movement and Boycott of British or European Goods on the Course of Trade, by Collector of Customs L. F. Morshead, Calcutta, 8 September 1906—Fortnightly Report from Government of Bengal, 17 September 1906. Home Public Progs B, October 1906, n. 13.

[222] *Bengalee*, 23 January 1908.

[223] Note by the Director-General of Commercial Intelligence Regarding the Swadeshi Boycott in Bengal, 5 October 1906—Home Public Progs Deposit, December 1906, n. 38. paras 5,7.

force down import figures in the following year, and a certain time-lag is in fact noticeable in the impact of the boycott on trade statistics, the sharp declines taking place in 1906-7 and 1908-9, whereas the political campaign acquired its highest tempo in 1905 and 1907.

In October 1906, the director-general of commercial intelligence F. Noel-Paton at Risley's request attempted a sample survey of the accumulation of stocks, collecting figures "*in strict confidence* from the four largest importers of piecegoods in Calcutta". Table II (see preceding page) indicates that by August 1906, unsold stocks had accumulated to an unprecedented extent in the warehouses of piecegoods importers.

Actual consumption figures are available for salt; these reveal a sharp drop in 1908-9 in the Liverpool article, and a corresponding rise in imports from non-English sources.

TABLE III[224]

Salt Consumption in Bengal and E. Bengal & Assam (in tons)

	1905-6	1906-7	1907-8	1908-9	1909-10	1910-11	1911-12
UK	173,318	177,021	171,443	126,870	164,604	154,059	178,164
Hamburg & Bremen	36,060	37,699	38,528	39,794	24,063	29,009	31,288
Spain				91,133	101,445	77,743	68,570
Port Said				21,269	30,764	45,216	43,887
Salif				74,157	60,416	57,015	57,533
Bombay	80,108	77.795	123,184	33,173	30,781	29,727	32,490
Madras				...	147	...	...
Aden				64,238	34,676	54,725	49,481
Phocee				2,060	861	—	—
Massowah	—	—	—		9,114	25,431	20,534
Tunis							1.374
Total	289,486	292,515	313,155	452,694	456,871	472,925	483,301

Thus the proportion of English salt in the total consumption of Bengal had fallen from 59 per cent in 1905-6 to 28 per cent in 1908-9, and despite some recovery, was still only 37 per cent in 1911-12.

[224] *Report on the Maritime Trade of Bengal, 1909-10*, p. 11, *ibid, 1911-12*, p. 11.

Then there is the problem of factors other than the boycott influencing fluctuations in demand. The world trade depression of 1907[223] may or may not have had something to do with the 14 per cent decline in the total volume of Bengal's overseas trade in 1908-9. Official sources often attributed the fall in demand to high prices—that of foreign piecegoods had risen by 24.75 per cent in 1906[226] and the *Report on Maritime Trade* linked "the reduced imports in 1906-7" with "the dearness of foodstuffs which prevailed over Bengal and the consuming districts upcountry".[227] As the swadeshi substitutes were almost invariably more expensive than their imported counterparts, this is not a particularly convincing argument—all the evidence indicates that the demand for swadeshi was rising during the same period. But it seems probable that the boycott of Manchester cloth owed much of its early success to the extraneous factor of a trade dispute between English manufacturers and Marwari dealers.[228] F. Noel-Paton noted that Manchester had often imposed unfair terms of trade, and "this it was that gave to the political agitators allies and the means of causing trouble".[229] The famous telegram of 1 September 1905 from the Marwari Chamber of Commerce in Calcutta to the Manchester Chamber calling for the withdrawal of the partition as otherwise "we shall be ruined and shall not be able to make future contracts",[230] and the spectacular drop in 'Lakshmi' or Lucky Day contracts (the auspicious day in the pujas on which business agreements for the coming year were customarily signed) from 32,000 packages in 1904 to only 2500 in 1905,[231] were thus not due to patriotic mo-

[225] D. R. Gadgil, *op. cit.*, p. 101.

[226] *Report on the Maritime Trade of Bengal, 1908-09*, p. 5.

[227] Home Public Progs Deposit, December 1906, n. 38, *op. cit.*, para 26.

[228] *Report on the Maritime Trade of Bengal, 1906-07*, p. 7.

[229] Home Public Progs Deposit, December 1906, n. 38, *op. cit.*, paras 15-22.

[230] *Bengalee*, 6 September 1905, gives the text of the telegram.

[231] Fortnightly Report from the Government of Bengal, 26 October 1906, para 3, Home Public Progs A, December 1906, n. 147.

tives alone. Once this trade dispute had blown over, the Marwari traders began renewing their bideshi contracts,[232] and on 22 May 1906 the *Bengalee* denounced them as "the greatest enemies of the swadeshi movement". Lakshmi Day sales in October 1906 reached the respectable figure of 25,000 packages.[233] The Bengal nationalists attempted to woo the Marwaris through the Maharashtrian leaders Tilak and Khaparde, but despite the latter's complacent diary entry —"We brought the Marwaris round. The Calcutta leaders apparently did not know how to speak to the Marwaris."[234] —compradore ties proved stronger than patriotism. The boycott in Bengal consequently could never be as effective as the contemporary Chinese protest against American immigration laws, in which 23 big importing firms had combined to virtually drive out US goods from the Chinese market.[235]

Statistics of annual trade also tell us nothing about short-period fluctuations, and give no help either in tracing the varying incidence of the boycott in the different districts of Bengal. Information on these two counts is not entirely unavailable, though it falls far short of anything like a complete account.

The *Statesman's* estimate of the boycott's impact on certain mufassil districts in its early days has often been quoted (see Table IV).

On 21 September 1905, the superintendent of the Calcutta police reported heavy losses among Marwari piecegoods retailers and Muslim boot-importers of the Chandni Chowk area. Thus "Mahomed Zubbar-Abdul Karim, Chandni

[232] *Bengalee*, 23 December 1905. *Hindi Bangabasi*, 11 June 1906—RNP(B) for week ending 16 June 1906.

[233] Home Public Progs A, December 1906, n. 147, *op. cit.*

[234] Diary of G. S. Khaparde, 12 June 1906. Tilak and Khaparde contacted the Marwaris again in course of their visit to Calcutta for the December 1906 Congress, and Khaparde informs us with engaging frankness that they were entertained at the house of a Marwari gentleman "with dancing of girls half religious, half amorous". *Ibid*, 23 December 1906.

[235] Dakshina R. Ghosh, *The Industrial Guide* (1907), Part VI, pp. 6-7.

TABLE IV[236]

Name of district	*Value of goods purchased in September 1904 (in Rs)*	*Value of goods purchased in September 1905 (in Rs)*
Jessore	30,000	2,000
Bogra	17,000	200
Dacca	5,000	2,000
Arrah	15,000	200
Hazaribagh	10,000	500
Nuddea	15,000	2,500
Malda	8,000	1,300
Burdwan	6,000	1,000

Chowk, usually daily sell, at this season of the year, a thousand rupees worth of imported goods. The value of their sales have dropped to Rs 40-50 a day, (and that of) Shaik Saboo and Shaik Jaboo from Rs 800-1,000 to Rs 100-50."[237] An European firm in the business wired to England: "Boycott result is most disastrous. Boots are not saleable. Puja season has closed. No demand for rice bowls, soap, glass bangles." L. F. Morshead, the collector of customs, reported in January 1906 that "sale of cigarettes have stopped so far as Bengalis are concerned".[238]

In September 1906, another report from L. F. Morshead

[236] *Statesman*, 14 September 1905. Cited in Haridas and Uma Mukherji, *India's Fight for Freedom* (1958), p. 65, and R. C. Majumdar, *History of the Freedom Movement in India*, Volume II (1963), p. 55. Dr Majumdar in this connection makes the somewhat surprising statement that "no exact statistics is available in respect of cotton goods, shoes and cigarettes, to which the boycott was mainly confined at the beginning..." *Ibid*, p. 53.

[237] Halliday to Carlyle, 21 September 1905—Home Public Progs B, October 1905, n. 114-15.

[238] Notes on the Extent to Which the 'Boycott' Has at Present Affected Wholesale and Retail Trade in Calcutta (by L. F. Morshead, collector of customs)—Report on the Agitation Against the Partition of Bengal, 25 January 1906, Enclosure F. Home Public Progs A, June 1906, n. 175.

noted sharp falls in the import of salt, cotton goods, boots and shoes, and cigarettes—though the demand for sugar was higher than ever:

TABLE V[239]

	1905 Aug.	*1906 Aug.*	*Increase*	*Decrease*	*%*
Salt (British) (Mds)	341,641	302,030	——	39,611	—11
Salt (Foreign) (Mds)	380,854	279,450	——	101,404	—26
Salt (Indian) (Mds)	47,580	76,615	29,035	——	+60
Sugar (Cwt)	238,053	470,416	232,363	——	+97
Cotton (Twist & Yarn) (Cwt)	1,361,452	752,994	——	608,458	—44
Cotton (piece-goods) (Yards)	145,128,912	112,497,948	——	32,630,964	—22
Boots & Shoes (Pairs)	76,824	20,965	——	47,129	—68
Cigarettes (Numbers)	57,803,690	25,685,880	——	32,117,810	—55

In October 1906, Noel-Paton gave the following indices of monthly imports, taking the average for the period from April 1904 to July 1906 as 100 (see Table VI on next page).[240]

Districtwise break-ups of sales figures of imported goods are unfortunately not available, but the scattered references in the Fortnightly Reports indicate a sharp contrast between West and East Bengal as regards the impact of the boycott. In the spring and early summer of 1907, the collector was reporting that boycott in Calcutta was "practically dead" and

[239] Fortnightly Report from Government of Bengal, 17 September 1906 —Home Public Progs B, October 1906, n. 13.
[240] Home Public Progs Deposit, December 1906, n. 38, para 43.

TABLE VI

		Piecegoods	*Salt*	*Cigarettes*	*Boots & shoes*
1905	July	106.50	104.86	123.03	150.88
	August	104.07	92.80	119.86	118.64
	September	106.03	86.59	128.66	123.36
	October	109.08	77.27	113.61	119.12
	November	103.22	75.08	111.76	87.62
	December	98.98	79.14	100.52	54.78
1906	January	107.35	105.45	109.20	45.00
	February	107.52	112.16	97.35	34.28
	March	106.20	118.79	94.09	46.62
	April	102.97	125.09	88.55	52.14
	May	103.41	128.41	88.25	62.30
	June	95.27	116.01	77.13	78.77
	July	94.66	110.03	67.88	71.50

trade conditions had regained virtual normalcy.[241] While this proved overoptimistic, there being a sharp fall again in demand in October 1907,[242] it seems evident that the general atmosphere in Calcutta and in the old province as a whole from 1907 onwards was not particularly favourable for the boycott enthusiast. From East Bengal, however, a report dated 25 May 1907 spoke of "the business in piecegoods and foreign salt and sugar" being heavily damaged by the agitation. Consignments of Liverpool salt "last month by private dealers amounted to only 4,000 maunds, whereas before the boycott they averaged from twenty to twenty-five thousand".[243] In districts like Bakargunj and Dacca, powerful volunteer samitis enforced the boycott rigorously through picketing and social ostracism; such organisations were far weaker in West Bengal.[244] The relative success of swadeshi and boycott in the new province is indicated also by the following statistics, unfortunately incomplete, of piecegoods

[241] Fortnightly Reports from Bengal, 25 March 1907, 26 April 1907. Home Public Progs A, April 1907, n. 209; May 1907, n. 267.
[242] Report on Maritime Trade of Bengal, 1907-1908, p. v.
[243] Fortnightly Report from Bengal, 25 May 1907—Home Public Progs A, June 1907, n. 220.
[244] Cf. below, Chapters VI, VII

and yarn imports from European and Indian sources into the divisions of Chittagong and Dacca:[245]

TABLE VII

(*figures in maunds*)

	1902-3	*1903-4*	*1904-5*	*1905-6*	*1906-7*
Chittagong division					
European piecegoods	23,511	29,447	44,854	31,363	12,389
Indian piecegoods	554	592	1,555	2,515	11,005
European twist & yarn	14,358	11,465	11,234	6,960	10,273
Indian twist & yarn	256	1,603	9,194	7,139	3,674
Dacca division					
European piecegoods	112,874	111,383	122,591	123,573	94,718
Indian piecegoods	6,972	4,040	5,269	12,253	9,394
European twist & yarn	19,492	19,756	22,638	21,125	14,385
Indian twist & yarn	3,258	3,939	5,492	3,566	3,866

Yet taken as a whole, the gap between expectation and achievement seems even wider in the boycott movement than in other aspects of the swadeshi age. We have confined our study to Bengal; on the overall trade figures of British India the boycott left hardly a dent—in cotton piecegoods, for example, the imports amounted to 231.96 crore yards in 1906-7, 253.40 crore yards in 1907-8, 199.42 crore yards in 1908-9, 219.47 crore yards in 1909-10, and 231.05 crore yards in 1910-11.[246] The indigenous substitute was simply not available in adequate quantity or quality in many cases, and

[245] G. N. Gupta, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

[246] "Statistical Abstracts Relating to British India"—quoted in A. Tripathi, *The Extremist Challenge* (1967), p. 219.

it was usually more expensive, too. In cotton textile, for instance, the Bombay mills could not yet manufacture the finer types of yarn and cloth, while the handloom product was inevitably costlier than the Manchester article. In salt, there was in Bengal a real displacement of Liverpool in favour of karkatch, but the latter too generally came from foreign sources like Spain. It is also a significant commentary on the social character of the movement that the boycott should have achieved its most spectacular early success in boots and shoes and cigarettes; as Morshead commented, the demand for such commodities came mainly from "Indian gentlemen of the middle class such as clerks, pleaders, etc., and they are the class who really take an interest in and are opposed to the partition".[247]

[247] Fortnightly Report from Bengal, 17 September 1906—Home Public Progs B, October 1906, n. 13.

Chapter Four

NATIONAL EDUCATION[1]

I. Origins

The intelligentsia of the swadeshi age was very much a product of western education, and the latter in its turn owed its exceptional extension in Bengal mainly to indigenous efforts. Indian initiative had been prominent in the establishment of the Hindu College, Rammohun Roy had pleaded eloquently for English education more than a decade before Macaulay's Minute, and the mufassil bhadralok had utilised Wood's grants-in-aid policy to set up an impressive number of middle and high English schools and private colleges even in remote districts of Bengal. The single subdivision of Madaripur in Faridpur district had more high schools than were to be found in the whole of the United Provinces outside the various district headquarters.[2] Yet a revulsion against western education was to become a major strand in the swadeshi movement, taking the two forms of calls for boycott of official schools and colleges, and attempts to build up a parallel and independent system of 'national education'.

[1] National education is the one aspect of the swadeshi movement about which a full-length study is available: Haridas and Uma Mukherji, *The Origins of the National Education Movement* (1957). In the present chapter, therefore, I have confined myself to discussing those aspects of national education which seem to me to have been inadequately covered by the above extremely useful work.

[2] *Bengal District Administration Committee Report, 1913-14* (1915), p. 139. Part IV of this report emphasises the unique spread of 'Anglo-Vernacular' education in rural Bengal and states that such schools had been "principally established by private effort".

The paradox, of course, had its roots in the past, and, for more than a generation prior to 1905, criticism of the official system of education had been mounting in Bengal. A brief survey of this manysided and not always selfconsistent polemic is the essential preliminary for an understanding of the developed concept of national education in the swadeshi days, which too had its internal tensions and contradictions.

In his famous letter to Lord Amherst of 11 December 1823, Rammohun had demanded English education primarily "to instruct the natives of India in Mathematics, Natural Philosophy, Chemistry, Anatomy and other useful Sciences..."[3] But the system as moulded by Macaulay and Wood had an overwhelmingly literary bias; not till the 1890s was an independent degree in science established in the Calcutta University, and, as late as 1908, only 38 students sat for the B.Sc. degree as compared to 1200 for the B.A.[4] The inevitable result was an ever-growing mass of graduates fit only for white-collar jobs in government service, law, education and mercantile firms, and the consequent problem of educated unemployment was becoming a serious headache by the turn of the century. Lord Curzon's government was worried primarily by the possible political implications of the growth of this 'intellectual proletariat',[5] and sought a solution through imposing stricter official control and restrictions upon higher education, under the cover of a lot of talk about raising standards. The nationalist alternative was diversification of the system through a shift in emphasis to technical and scientific education, with which was closely connected the parallel theme of promoting the industrial development of India. The Congress from 1887 onwards repeatedly passed resolutions calling for education

[3] S. D. Collet, *The Life and Letters of Raja Rammohun Roy* (Edited by D. K. Biswas and P. C. Ganguli, 1962), Appendix II, p. 458.

[4] J. C. Bagal, *Pramathanath Bose* (1955), p. 67. J. G. Cumming, *Review of the Industrial Position and Prospects in Bengal in 1908*, p. 36.

[5] The phrase is used in the *Bengal District Administration Committee Report*, *op. cit.*, p. 172.

with a technical bias.[6] Pramathanath Bose had drawn up a detailed scheme in his pamphlet *Technical and Scientific Education in Bengal* (1886),[7] and the 1905 days witnessed complete unanimity as regards the need for technical training —though opinions differed as to whether it should constitute the whole, or just an important part, of national education.

The founding fathers of the Bengal Renaissance had welcomed the introduction of English as the medium of instruction, since at that time the alternative had been not really the still-undeveloped vernacular, but the retention of Sanskrit and Persian and so of what Rammohun had condemned as the pre-Baconian style of learning. With the rapid development of the Bengali language and literature, this rationale had lost much of its force by the closing decades of the century—yet English remained the sole medium of higher education, and the Calcutta University did not even have a compulsory paper in Bengali in its B.A. syllabus till 1906.[8] The changeover, by the way, is very far from complete even today, more than twenty years after independence. The negative effects of the foreign medium manifested themselves in much cramming and parrot-learning as the average student wrestled with an alien tongue, and even more disastrously in the growing alienation between the English-educated elite and the masses, with the former in course of time developing a kind of vested interest in the established system of education. The 'filtration theory' provided a convenient alibi for the gross neglect of primary education by government and educated bhadralok alike.

The early advocates of the vernacular medium included, interestingly enough, some among the Derozians, so often abused as denationalised Anglicists.[9] The Tattwabodhini Path-

[6] Annie Besant, *How India Wrought For Freedom* (1915), pp. 53, 72, 92, 138, 179, 227, 288, 309, 325, 351, 437, 461, 488, 507, 524, 546, 567.
[7] J. C. Bagal, *op. cit.*, pp. 62-67. Cf. above, Chapter III.
[8] The *Sahitya* of Asar 1313 (June-July 1906) welcomed this introduction as a triumph for swadeshi.
[9] Thus in June 1838, Udaychandra Addhya presented before a meeting of the Society for the Acquisition of General Knowledge a "proposal for

sala started by Debendranath Tagore in 1840 had as one of its aims "the education of the rising youths in the vernacular languages of the country".[10] Bankimchandra in his *Banga-darshan* phase repeatedly noted with alarm the growing gulf between the English-educated babu and the masses, and, unlike most of his fellow-bhadralok, he refused to condemn Campbell's policy of stepping up grants for primary education at the cost of some reductions in the Berhampore, Krishnagore and Sanskrit colleges.[11] In the 1890s, the cause of the mother-tongue found powerful advocates in Gurudas Bandopadhyay, the first Indian vicechancellor of Calcutta University,[12] Prafullachandra Ray, Ramendrasundar Trivedi[13] and—above all—Rabindranth Tagore. In a brilliant essay entitled "Shikshar her-pher" (Vagaries of Education—1893), Rabindranath made the interesting point that the foreign medium had actually hindered the assimilation of progressive western values in two ways—by confining the benefits of education to a small minority, and by rendering superficial the

the proper cultivation of the Bengali language and its necessity for the natives of this country". The original Bengali text of this paper is given in Gautam Chattopadhyay, *Awakening of Bengal in the Early 19th Century*, Volume I (Progressive Publishers, 1965), Appendix I.

[10] *Calcutta Courier*, 3 June 1840—quoted in Debendranath Tagore, *Atmajivani* (4th edition, 1962), p. 299.

[11] Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay, "Bangadarshaner pratham suchana" (1872), "Lokashiksha" (1878), "Vividha prabandha"—*Bankimchandrer sahitya granthabali*, Volume II (n.d.), pp. 194-98, 288-89. R. K. Dasgupta, "National Education: Ideas of Bhudeb, Bankim, Gurudas and Satischandra" (paper read at Jadavpur University Seminar, 1967). C. E. Buckland, *Bengal under the Lieutenant-Governors*, Vol. I (1902), pp. 526-32.

[12] Convocation Addresses, 1891, 1892—cited in R. K. Dasgupta, *op. cit.*, Cf. also Saratkumar Roy, *Bangagaurab Sir Gurudas Bandopadhyay* (4th ed., 1929), Chapters 6, 7.

[13] Both Prafullachandra and Ramendrasundar were life-long advocates of the mother-tongue as the medium in all subjects—including the sciences. P. C. Ray, *Life and Experiences of a Bengali Chemist*, Volume I (1932), pp. 289-99. Brojendranath Bandopadhyay, *Ramendra-sunder Trivedi—Sahitya-sadhak-charitmala*, Volume VI, no. 70.

enlightenment of even that narrow elite.[14] He also answered in advance most of the arguments against a change in the medium of instruction—the absence of textbooks, the allegedly irreplaceable role of English as our window on the outside world—which are still in use today after seventy-five years.[15] In course of the succeeding decade, Rabindranath time and again returned to the fundamental problem of the alienation of the bhadralok from the masses, and suggested—most notably in his "Swadeshi Samaj" address of 1904—a variety of imaginative forms of popular education, including the use of traditional folk media (the mela, the jatra, and the kathakata) as well as the modern audio-visual method of magic-lantern talks. The national education movement of the swadeshi days accepted in theory the need to establish Bengali as the medium of instruction, but few among its leaders shared Tagore's passion for the mother-tongue or his agony of alienation.

In the writings of Satischandra Mukherji, the polemic against the established system of instruction is focused rather on the quality and the content of higher education. Through numerous articles in the *Dawn* and particularly his long essay "An Examination into the Present System of University Education in India and a Scheme of Reform" (April-June 1902), Satischandra attacked the Indian universities for being merely examining bodies and for their utter failure to develop any kind of creative thinking or research. He suggested a division of students into two categories, 'general' and 'special', with the latter—the brilliant few who love learning for its own sake as distinct from the mass of job-seekers—being trained through "high-standard" lectures and examinations given

[14] Tagore, R. R. XII, pp. 285-86. The original essay was published in *Sadhana*, Paus 1299 (1893).

[15] Thus he pointed out that textbooks required only a serious and sincere effort, and that abandonment of English as medium of instruction did not in the least contradict the study of English as an invaluable foreign language. *Ibid*, pp. 621-22. Original in *Sadhana*, Asar 1300 (1893).

and conducted by specially-equipped teachers, who should themselves be "original workers" in their respective subjects.[16] The emphasis upon developing a "higher culture"[17] among the elite is evident also in the work of the Dawn Society, founded by Satischandra in 1902 with the best students of Calcutta University among its leading members.[18] The cadres trained by him were to form the core of the Bengal National College in its first years.

The most common charge against western education in the swadeshi days was of course that it was tending to denationalise the students, that its secularism was an insidious way of uprooting Indians from their traditional religion, and that it was threatening to make to them meek servants of foreign rule and slavish imitators of the West. Education "on national lines and under national control"[19] became therefore the great slogan of the movement. Here, too, precedents from the nineteenth century were not lacking. Debendranath's Tattwabodhini Pathsala for Upanishadic training, the Hindu Hitarthi Vidyalaya set up in 1845 at his initiative to fight the Christian proselytisers,[20] the National School of Nabagopal Mitra in 1870, the City College and numerous schools established by the Brahmos in Calcutta and the mufassil during the '70s and the '80s, the first schools of the Ramakrishna Mission, Satischandra Mukherji's Bhagavat

[16] "On Education and Examination", *Dawn*, March, May, July 1901; "An Examination into the Present System of University Education in India and a Scheme for Reform", *Ibid*, April-June 1902. Both were by Satischandra Mukherji. The assumption that the research-scholar is ipso facto the ideal teacher is of course somewhat questionable.

[17] A favourite expression of Satischandra—Cf. his article "Means of Higher Culture" in *Ibid*, December 1901.

[18] For the work of the Dawn Society, see below, Chapter VII.

[19] The phrase was first used in the resolution passed at the education conference at the Bengal Landholders' Association on 16 November 1905. It was repeated in the constitution of the National Council of Education adopted on 11 March 1906, and in the resolution on National Education passed at the Calcutta congress of December 1906. Haridas and Uma Mukherji, *op. cit.*, pp. 37, 44. Annie Besant, *op. cit.*, p. 461.

[20] Debendranath Tagore, *op. cit.*, p. 65, 342-43.

Chatuspathi (1895) giving some twenty scholars "a thorough training in Hindu thought, life and manners",[21] Rabindranath's asrama near Bolpur (1901)—all these in varying ways had sought to preserve indigenous values in education. But of course there was no agreement as to what exactly was 'national', and how much of western forms and values should be rejected and what elements retained.

Voices were occasionally heard in the swadeshi period calling for a total rejection of the West, a wholesale return to the 'tols' complete with caste distinctions in education.[22] 'Aryan knowledge' must predominate in the swadeshi schools, declared the *Sandhya* of 2 September 1905.[23] But in practice such effusions had little importance, since even the most orthodox generally accepted at least the need for industrial training on modern lines.[24] A man like Satischandra Mukherji was certainly no obscurantist enemy of the West—far less so Rabindranath, the other great theorist of national education.

Rabindranath's Santiniketan represented a poet's imaginative reaction against the factory-like atmosphere of conventional urban schools. Children should be given the chance, he eloquently pleaded, to learn from nature herself under open skies, where the rhythm of the seasons and the starlit nights would teach them far better science than any formal textbook or class-lecture. The asrama ideal of ancient India attracted him strongly, with its austere simplicity so natural to a poor country like ours and its close personal ties between the guru and his pupils.[25] Traditionalist pulls were also strong on the

[21] "Third Report of the Bhagavat Chatuspathi", *Dawn*, June 1899.
[22] *Rangalay*, 22 November 1903, 13 March 1904—RNP(B) for weeks ending 28 November 1903 and 19 March 1904.
[23] RNP(B) for week ending 9 September 1905.
[24] Thus the *Sri Vishnu Priya o Anandabazar Patrika* of 20 January 1904 wanted encouragement of tols to be combined with "selfreliant efforts" to promote scientific education—a typical example of the attempt to have the best of both worlds. RNP(B) for week ending 30 January 1904.
[25] "Shiksha samashya", *Bhandar*, Asar 1313 (1906)—Tagore, R.R. XII, pp. 295-313.

Tagore of this period, as is indicated for instance by the important role assigned to Brahmabandhab Upadhyay during the asrama's first days, the poet's evocation of an idealised Hindu past in a new year address of 1902,[26] and his choice of the socially orthodox Gurudas Banerji as leader of the prospective Swadeshi Samaj in 1904.[27] Even caste distinctions during meals were observed at the asrama for a brief while.[28] But all this was just a passing phase with him, and while the asrama form with its simplicity and close links with nature was sought to be retained till the end, the content of education was steadily broadened, till Santiniketan developed into Viswabharati—"yatra viswa bhabet ekanidam" (where the whole world finds its home in one nest) and the institution which had been started on stern 'brahmacharya' ideals became a pioneer of coeducation.

Satischandra's educational ideas were at once less unconventional and more in tune with the revivalist currents of the age. Unlike Rabindranath, and despite the influence of his positivist father,[29] the mature Satischandra was firmly rooted in orthodox Hinduism. The *Dawn* proclaimed that "while remaining fully alive to the usefulness and the necessity" of other systems of culture, "western or eastern", "as Hindus we propose to make a special study of Hindu life, thought and faith, in a spirit of appreciation..."[30] Satischandra eagerly accepted and tried to implement later on through the National Council Sir George Birdwood's suggestions regarding Indian education conveyed to him in a letter dated 9 September 1898.[31] Western science and technical instruc-

[26] "Nababarsha", *Bangadarshan*, Baisakh 1309 (1902)—R.R. IV. The address offered a kind of justification even for caste—*op. cit.*, pp. 374-75.

[27] "Swadeshi samaj", *Bangadarshan*, Bhadra 1311 (1904)—Viswabharati Edition (1962), p. 115.

[28] Prabhatkumar Mukhopadhyay, *Rabindra-jibani* (1954), Volume II, p. 47.

[29] Haridas and Uma Mukherji, *op. cit.*, pp. 181-83.

[30] *Dawn*, March-May 1897.

[31] The *Dawn* of June 1899 reprinted this letter under the title "Indian Problems from an English Point of View".

tion must be retained and promoted, Birdwood advised his Indian friend, but in the humanities the whole emphasis must shift to the cultivation of "your literary and artistic and your philosophical and religious—in a word, your spiritual culture", and for that "the first thing to do is to take the whole of your higher education more into your own hands". Birdwood also made it quite explicit that by India he meant the "India of the Hindus". The programme of the National Council of Education envisaged a similar combination of scientific and technical education with provision for "denominational religious education" (though no religious rites were to be enforced) and a general emphasis on India's past achievements in all spheres of learning.[32] Admirers may find in all this a search for a synthesis of East and West; less reverent observers would probably note that such eclectic combinations of the material goods of the modern era with the moral and social values of traditional orthodoxy have always been the typical reaction of the intelligent conservative. One remembers Radhakanta Deb, who actively promoted English education, and yet organised the Dharmasabha in defence of sati and insisted upon the dismissal of Derozio.[33]

To men like Rabindranath and Satischandra, the conception of national education initially had little to do with politics; it formed a part of their vision of constructive swadeshi, of the autonomous development of the resources of the country ignoring, rather than directly opposing, the foreign rulers.[34] But a political impulse was necessary to transform national education into a popular movement, and graft on to its programme the militant slogan of boycott of existing educational institutions—and that impulse of course came from Curzon.

[32] Haridas and Uma Mukherji, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

[33] For Radhakanta's role in the dismissal of Derozio, cf. the Hindu College Records of 1831, cited in Susobhan Chandra Sarkar, "Derozio and Young Bengal"—*Studies in the Bengal Renaissance* (1958), p. 22.

[34] The clearest expression of this mood is to be found in a number of essays by Rabindranath written during the decade preceding 1905. Cf. for instance "Ingraj o bharatbashi", R.R.X; "Atyukti", R.R.IV.

The Universities Act of 1904, which tightened official control over the senate and transferred to the government the power of granting affiliations, was considered by all sections of nationalist opinion to be a major threat to the 'independence of the universities' and ultimately to the whole future of higher education.[35] While the agitation on this issue generally followed the beaten track of prayers and petitions, and died down soon enough once the bill had become law, there was some talk about trying to set up an independent national university.[36] Asutosh Chaudhuri later revealed that an estimate had been made about this time of the cost of such a university[37] and Rabindranath emphasised that efforts in this direction constituted "at the present juncture our sole agenda, our only duty".[38] He repeated the plea nine months later while denouncing a government proposal (ultimately dropped) to use four different dialects in the primary schools of Bengal—a move in which educated circles saw yet another proof of the divide-and-rule designs of Risley and Curzon.[39]

The first three issues (April-June 1905) of *Bhandar*, the new monthly started by the poet, carried a stimulating discussion of the problem (posed by Surendranath Banerji) of bridging the gulf between the educated elite and the masses. Summing up, Rabindranath stated that all his contributors seemed

[35] Lovat Fraser, *India under Curzon and After* (1911), pp. 175-89. Resolutions on the Universities Bill, sent to A. C. Banerji by Bhupendranath Bose, 30 January 1904—*Private Papers of Aswinicoomar Banerji.*

[36] The *Rangalay* of 22 November 1903 commented: "Let the English pass whatever laws they please; why do we not, on our own part, ourselves take charge of our national education independently of them?" RNP(B) for week ending 28 November 1903.

[37] The estimated amount was Rs 15 lakhs, plus a monthly expenditure of Rs 2,500. This was mentioned by Asutosh Chaudhuri at a meeting at the Field and Academy Club on 12 November 1905. Kedarnath Dasgupta, *Shikshar andolan,* 1905, Chapter II.

[38] "University Bill", *Bangadarshan,* Asar 1311 (June-July 1904). Tagore, R.R.III, pp. 597, 599.

[39] "Saphalatar sadupay", *Bangadarshan,* Chaitra, 1311 (March-April 1905)—*Ibid,* R.R.III, p. 573.

agreed on the need for mass education; and for this independent efforts were evidently necessary, since the government would obviously try to keep the scope of primary education rigidly confined, so that the peasant learnt to be a good peasant but nothing more. National education at the collegiate level posed a very serious problem of employment, as its products were likely to be excluded from government jobs. For this reason too, it would be wiser to concentrate on primary and secondary education with which should be combined training in useful crafts.[40] Similar ideas were put forward by Ramendrasundar Trivedi and Lalitkumar Bandopadhyay, both of whom in the winter of 1905-6 suggested that efforts should be concentrated on mass education, rather than trying to start a model college or providing research training for the student elite.[41] It is a pity that this excellent advice was largely ignored by the national education movement of the swadeshi days, which plunged into the ambitious adventure of a parallel university, and adopted as its guide Satischandra, with his somewhat esoteric ideals of higher education, rather than Rabindranath.

An educational boycott was in the air from within a few weeks of the announcement of the partition decision. The lead was taken initially by the group described as "ultraradicals" by the *Amrita Bazar Patrika*—Bepinchandra Pal, P. Mitter, Dr S. K. Mullick, A. C. Banerji, C. R. Das, J. N. Roy, and a few other barristers.[42] At a meeting held in the Albert Hall on 5 August 1905 (virtually blacked out, interestingly enough, by Surendranath's *Bengalee*), a fund was established "in aid of students who would leave colleges under European management and join institutions managed by their fellow-countrymen"; Shyamsundar Chakrabarti headed the

[40] *Bhandar*, Baisakh-Asar 1312 (April-June 1905), *Ibid.*, R.R.XII, pp. 515-17, 521-23.

[41] Ramendrasundar Trivedi, "Swadeshi viswabidyalay", *Bangadarshan*, Agrahayan 1312 (1905). Lalitkumar Bandopadhyay, "Prastabita jatiya viswabidyalay", *Bharati*, Agrahayan-Chaitra 1312 (1905-6).

[42] *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 19 August 1905.

list of donors with Rs 100.[43] The fund was placed in the charge of Dr S. K. Mullick, and a few weeks later students who wanted a transfer to Indian colleges were being asked to contact him.[44] The *Sandhya* of 18 July and the *Pratijna* of 23 August called for the organisation of a national university.[45] Meanwhile the bright young men associated with Satischandra Mukherji's Dawn Society were also very active. After listening to a stirring address by Hirendranath Dutta, three of the best students of the university, Rabindranarayan Ghosh, Nripendrachandra Banerji and Radhakumud Mukherji issued a manifesto in September 1905 calling for a boycott of the coming M.A. and P.R.S. examinations; they were joined in this campaign by Benoykumar Sarkar, holder of the Ishan scholarship.[46]

Repressive measures directed against student demonstrators and picketers soon converted the educational boycott into something like a mass upsurge. Disciplinary action against Dacca Government College students for coming barefoot to class as a protest against the partition,[47] and the Pedlar letter of 21 October to certain principals demanding the expulsion of boys involved in a student-police clash on Harrison Road[48] were the first straws in the wind. A spate of executive orders followed—the Carlyle Circular of 10 October 1905 (published on 22 October) threatening withdrawal of grants and scholarships and disaffiliation of institutions which failed to prevent student participaton in politics, and the Lyon Circu-

[43] *Ibid*, 7 August 1905.
[44] *Ibid*, 25 August 1905.
[45] RNP(B) for weeks ending 29 July and 2 September 1905. It is surprising that the Mukherjis' otherwise very detailed account of the beginnings of the national education movement omit these early developments altogether. The work as a whole suffers from a somewhat exaggerated adulation for Satis Mukherji and his associates; other forces and individuals in the movements tend to be neglected.
[46] Nripendrachandra Banerji, *At the Crossroads* (1950), p. 71. Haridas and Uma Mukherji, *op. cit.*, pp. 19-21.
[47] *Dacca Prakash*, 10 September 1905—RNP(B) for week ending 16 September 1905. *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 13 November 1905.
[48] *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 27 October 1905.

lars in East Bengal banning the Bande Mataram slogan and adding the rider that boys of recalcitrant schools and colleges could be debarred from government service.[49] Action taken during the next two or three months included the expulsion of 263 boys from two schools in Rangpur and about 60 from the Dacca Collegiate school; the dismissal of Kaliprasanna Dasgupta, headmaster of Madaripur school; the punishment of smaller groups of students in Noakhali, Dinajpur, Jalpaiguri and Mymensingh; and Fuller's request to the Calcutta University in February 1906 to disaffiliate the Banwarilal and the Victoria high schools of Serajgunj.[50]

The *Sandhya* of 25 October 1905 reported that about a thousand students had taken a pledge to boycott the official educational institutions.[51] On the previous day, a meeting at the Field and Academy Club grounds had heard Abdul Rasul, Bepinchandra Pal, Shyamsundar Chakrabarti and Jnanendranath Roy urge the setting-up of a national university as the only effective reply to the Carlyle Circular.[52] During the next three weeks, student rallies were being held almost every day in Calcutta, with the Field and Academy as the favourite venue.[53] The speakers included Satischandra Mukherji, Rabindra-

[49] 1679 P.D. from R. W. Carlyle of 10 October 1905; D. O. from P. C. Lyon of 16 October 1905. Resignation of J. Bampfylde Fuller—PP. (House of Commons) Cd. 3242, Volume 81 (1906).

[50] Letter from the Government of E. Bengal and Assam to the Government of India (Home Department), No. 935 T.C. of 21 February 1906; Telegram from the same to the same, 17 April 1906. Home Public Progs A, June 1906, n. 177, 182.

[51] RNP(B) for week ending 28 October 1905. Brahmabandhab's *Sandhya* was throughout the most militant advocate of a boycott of what it styled 'Goldighir golamkhana'—'the slave-house of Goldighi' (College Square), i.e. the Calcutta University. Cf. *Sandhya*, 31 October and 4 November 1905—RNP(B) for weeks ending 4 November and 11 November 1905.

[52] *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 25 October 1905. Kedarnath Dasgupta, *op. cit.*, p. 1.

[53] The pamphlet *Shikshar andolan* lists seven meetings at the Field and Academy Club grounds between 24 October and 17 November 1905; there were four student rallies at the College Square during the same period. Along with contemporary newspapers, this invaluable

nath Tagore, Hirendranath Dutta, Sister Nivedita and Krishnakumar Mitra, apart from the socalled ultraradicals already mentioned. That it was a genuine upsurge from below is indicated by the prominence of student leaders—foremost among the latter being Sachindraprasad Basu of City College, who with the advice of Krishnakumar and assistance of Ramakanta Roy started the Anti-Circular Society on 4 November 1905.[54] Sachindraprasad and Ramakanta rushed to Rangpur, and helped to found there on 8 November the first national school in Bengal for the local expelled students.[55] The society also started a school for rusticated students from the mufassil in Calcutta itself, at the residence of Krishnakumar Mitra.[56] Meanwhile, promises of funds for the national university were pouring in—Dr S. K. Mullick offered a thousand rupees on 25 October,[57] Subodh Mullick won for himself the title of 'Raja' by his gift of one lakh rupees on 9 November, and a five lakh pledge was made, at first anonymously, by Brojendrakishore Raychaudhuri.[58]

But by the middle of November, steps were being taken to softpedal the more militant aspects of the movement. The

pamphlet permits an almost day-by-day reconstruction of this stage of the movement. As this has already been done by the Mukherjis (*op. cit.*, pp. 25-39), I am omitting the details in my account.

[54] *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 6 November 1905.

[55] The school started with about 300 boys, and was conducted by an executive committee of twenty members, fifteen of whom were from the local bar. Three Calcutta students—Nripendrachandra Banerji, Brajasundar Roy and Hiralal Mukherji—volunteered as teachers; among the local enthusiasts was the novelist Prabhatkumar Mukherji. Nripendrachandra Banerji, *op. cit.*, pp. 71-72; Haridas and Uma Mukherji, *op. cit.*, pp. 27-31.

[56] Sukumar Mitra, "Sri Aurobindo Ackroyd Ghosh", *Mashik Basumati*, Paus 1358 (1951). Krishnakumar Mitra, *Atmacharit* (1937), pp. 250-51. Report from the Government of Bengal to the Government of India (Home), No. 710 P of 23 March 1906, citing a Calcutta police report of 11 February 1906—Home Public Progs A, June 1906, n. 178. This is another item not mentioned by the Mukherjis.

[57] *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 26 October 1905.

[58] Haridas and Uma Mukherji, *op. cit.*, pp. 32-33.

moderate politicians had become somewhat overshadowed during the last few weeks, and Surendranath himself had been away on vacation at Simultala;[59] with his return, they re-asserted their control. The conference convened by Asutosh Chaudhuri at the Bengal Landholders' on 16 November listened to a passionate speech by Sachindraprasad Basu which is said to have moved Rashbehari Ghosh to tears,[60] but its decisions were cold-blooded and cautious to the point of timidity. A provisional committee was set up to explore the possibilities of a system of national education, but in the meantime the examination boycott was to be immediately called off.[61] The retreat caused considerable dismay and resentment, which was reflected in the speeches of Bepinchandra Pal, Jnanendranath Roy and Liakat Husain at the Field and Academy Club meetings of 24 and 26 November.[62] The mufassil students felt badly let down, for many of them had already left or been expelled from the official schools; their anger was echoed in the speeches of men like Surendranath Roychaudhuri of Rangpur and Kaliprasanna Dasgupta, the dismissed headmaster of Madaripur.[63] A cautious policy was not unreasonable : alternative arrangements to receive the student-boycotters required time, the authorities of big private colleges like City or Ripon (Surendranath himself in this latter case) had an obvious interest in avoiding a direct clash with the university, and it was the sincere desire of men like Gurudas Banerji to

[59] Caustic remarks about this absence "away from his post of duty" were made by Hemendraprasad Ghosh in his letter "Wanted a University" published in the *Telegraph* of 25 October and the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* of 26 October 1905.

[60] Surendrakumar Chakrabarti in *Sachindraprasad Basu* (a collection of tributes published after his death in 1941).

[61] Haridas and Uma Mukherji, *op. cit.*, pp. 36-38.

[62] Kedarnath Dasgupta, *op. cit.* Pal for instance exhorted the students to continue the boycott despite the advice of the leaders, compared the private college authorities with Marwari shopkeepers upon whom patriotism had to be enforced through picketing, and cited a reported comment by Sibnath Sastri that a year's holiday from studies would not ruin the students.

[63] *Loc. cit.*

supplement but not supplant[64] government efforts in education. But the forebodings of the critics had also their justification—the psychological moment when students in considerable numbers had been prepared to take the plunge and leave the official schools and colleges was lost, and it would never return. Later nationalist appeals to join the national schools en masse met with remarkably little response, even after the provocation offered by Risley's Educational Circular of 6 May 1907.

II. National Education in Calcutta

A second conference at the Landholders' Association on 10 December 1905 set up a small ways and means committee to finalise the scheme for a National Council of Education.[65] The plan was approved and the National Council constituted at a third conference on 11 March 1906,[66] but meanwhile serious internal differences had revealed themselves, leading to a breakaway led by men like Taraknath Palit and Nilratan Sircar, and the eventual formation of the Society for the Promotion of Technical Education. The immediate dispute was over the scope and content of national education. The dissidents wanted to concentrate on technical training alone, while the majority desired to combine it with literary and scientific instruction in an ambitious 'three-dimensional' scheme which would also emphasise 'national' values and with its hierarchy of affiliated institutions present a real alternative to the Calcutta University. So much is obvious and well-known, but two letters published in the *Bengalee* a few days after the conference indicate the presence of another issue of a somewhat ideological character. A number of prominent

[64] Nripendrachandra Banerji, *op. cit.*, p. 73, uses this phrase to describe Gurudas Banerji's attitude, as conveyed to him by Rabindranarayan Ghosh. A similar formula—"not in opposition to, but standing apart from"—was used later on in the programme of the National Council of Education to describe its relationship with the established educational system.

[65] Haridas and Uma Mukherji, *op. cit.*, p. 42.

[66] *Bengalee*, 13 March 1906.

Brahmos, it seems, had been deliberately excluded from the 92-member National Council, among them Prankrishna Acharyya, Sibnath Sastri and—most surprising of all—Krishnakumar Mitra, who had been extremely active in the early days of the movement.[67] Nareshchandra Sengupta, who had presided over the inaugural meeting of the Anti-Circular Society at the height of the educational boycott movement,[68] now bluntly declared that the National Council list was "most unsatisfactory", warned that "the exclusion of some eminently eligible gentlemen who happen to be all Brahmos has succeeded in creating a regular split", and made a broad hint that pressure from donors was responsible for this unfortunate situation.[69] Confirmation of this suspicion comes from a source by no means friendly to the Brahmos. Hemendraprasad Ghosh's unpublished diary presents the meeting of 11 March in an unusual, if not exactly flattering, light: "From 4 to 6 p.m. the busy-bodies hopped from chair to chair and room to room haggling with Mr T. Palit. But he would not give his proposed donation. So the constitution approved by Babus Brojendro K. Roychaudhuri and Subodh Ch. Mullick was passed. Dr Pran Kissen Acharyya took exception to a change being made in the list of councillors."[70] In his deed of endowment, Brojendrakishore—the biggest single donor to the National Council—explicitly set aside a sum of Rs 2,000 annually (10 per cent of the total yearly income from his donation) for the "imparting of Hindu religious education to Hindu youths". And if the National Council collapsed, the whole sum of five lakhs was to be ex-

[67] Letter signed "A Hindu Observer", *Ibid*, 23 March 1906. The correspondent remarked: "Although we are not Brahmos still we cannot forget the inestimable service the Brahmos have done to our country. ...our salvation lies not in bringing back again the Bengal of 500 years ago but in making out a new Bengal very much after the pattern of the rising sun of the East."

[68] *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 6 November 1905.

[69] *Bengalee*, 28 March 1906.

[70] Unpublished Diary of Hemendraprased Ghosh, entry for 11 March 1906.

pended on a "denominational educational institution carried on strictly orthodox Hindu principles for the benefit of Hindu youths only".[71]

The Society for the Promotion of Technical Education concentrated its resources on the Bengal Technical Institute, started on 25 July 1906 at 92 Upper Circular Road with a three-tier scheme of studies, primary (meant for training artisans and skilled labourers), intermediate, and secondary.[72] The principal financial support came from Taraknath Palit, who contributed Rs 2,000 a month, but donations were also made by the maharajas of Kassimbazar, Mayurbhanj, Mymensingh and Coochbehar and a number of other zamindars. Pramathanath Bose became the first principal, and Nilratan Sircar the secretary; the two treasurers being Gaganendranath Tagore and Kumar Manmathanath Mitra.[73] A close link with the contemporary upsurge of economic swadeshi is indicated by the emphasis laid in the course of studies on training in ceramics, dyeing, soap-making, tanning, and candle and match manufacture. The staff included Satyasundar Deb of the Calcutta Pottery Works, and Nilratan Sircar and Manindra Nandi were of course also the two leading swadeshi entrepreneurs.[74] Jagadischandra Basu, Prafullachandra Ray and Brojendranath Seal served on a committee of advisers. In January 1907, there were 68 students in the intermediate department and 114 in the secondary;[75] the total, however, had gone down to 124 by October 1909.[76] The Bengal Technical Institute has received a somewhat cavalier

[71] The text of this deed of endowment, signed by Brojendrakishore on 26 June 1906, is given in a letter from the Government of E. Bengal and Assam to the Government of India (Home), proposing an attachment of the estates of the Gauripur zamindars—No. 845 C, 6 January 1908. Home Political Progs A, February 1908, n. 102.

[72] *Bengalee*, 26 June 1906. Haridas and Uma Mukherji, *op. cit.*, pp. 48-50.

[73] J. C. Bagal, *Pramathanath Bose* (1955), pp. 102-8. The house on Upper Circular Road also belonged to Palit.

[74] Haridas and Uma Mukherji, *loc. cit.*

[75] *Bengalee*, 4 January 1907.

[76] *Dawn*, October 1909.

treatment from the historians of the national education movement, who quote approvingly Benoykumar Sarkar's description of its work as "*Mistrification*, pure and simple"[77] (i.e. the training of mere mechanics). But while always far more modest and limited than its rival, the institute also proved more viable, meeting as it did a real need not adequately covered by the official system of education. Within a few years of the merger of 1910, as Benoykumar Sarkar woefully admits, "not a student cared to come for a literary and scientific instruction along national lines"[78]—and all that survived of the wreck of the national education movement in Calcutta was the College of Engineering and Technology, the real institutional nucleus perhaps of the modern Jadavpur University.

The National Council of Education drew up in 1906 a curriculum for a three-year primary, seven-year secondary and four-year collegiate course. Literary and scientific education was to be combined with some amount of technical training up to the fifth year of the secondary course (corresponding to the matriculation level), after which the three streams would be divided.[79] Provision was made for a system of affiliation and grants-in-aid "to the extent of Rs 1,000 a month", and stipends and scholarships were created "of the aggregate annual value of Rs 4,000".[80] But the bulk of the resources was concentrated, perhaps somewhat disproportionately, on the Bengal National College and School started on 15 August 1906 on Bowbazar Street, with Aurobindo Ghosh as its first principal and Satischandra Mukherji as superintendent. The extremely thorough survey made of the work and achievements of this college by Haridas and Uma Mukherji makes a detailed account redundant here.[81] Satischandra Mukherji

[77] Quoted from B. K. Sarkar's *Education for Industrialisation* (1946), in Haridas and Uma Mukherji, *op. cit.*, p. 172.
[78] *Ibid.* p. 174.
[79] *Ibid*, pp. 50-51.
[80] Report on National Schools in Bengal (up to 30 September 1910), para 5. Home Political Progs A, March 1911, n. 7.
[81] Cf. Haridas and Uma Mukherji, *op. cit.*, Chapter III.

was indisputably the key figure down to his resignation in December 1908 from the posts of superintendent and principal (he had officiated in the latter post also after Aurobindo had resigned on 2 August 1907). The young men trained by him through the Dawn Society—Rabindranarayan Ghosh, Radhakumud Mukherji, Benoykumar Sarkar, Haranchandra Chakladar—formed the core of the teaching staff, and they had already started making a name for themselves through research work in ancient Indian history and culture and treatises on linguistics and education. Other teachers included Mokshadacharan Samadhyay and Sakharam Ganesh Deuskar (both with revolutionary connections), and the Pali scholar Dharmanand Kosambi.[82] The all-India outlook of the leaders of national education is noteworthy; the study of Hindi and Marathi was encouraged (as well as of Pali, Persian and Sanskrit and also French and German);[83] the National Council maintained connections with similar organisations in Maharashtra, Berar and Andhra;[84] and the *Dawn* published articles suggesting Devanagri and Hindustani as the common script and language for India.[85] Apart from the humanities, physics, chemistry and biology departments were also started in the college, though this took some time, and the manufactural section of the technical department (with Brojendrakishore as financial director) was doing very good work by 1909 as a kind of feeder to many swadeshi industries.[86] On Convocation and Prize Day in April 1908, the Bengal National College claimed 450 students; two years later, an official estimate put the figure at about 200.[87]

[82] *Ibid*, pp. 83-89. Dharmanand Kosambi incidentally was the father of D. D. Kosambi, distinguished mathematician, historian and Marxist scholar.

[83] *Ibid*, p. 65.

[84] *Dawn*, July 1909.

[85] *Ibid*, January, June and October 1908.

[86] Haridas and Uma Mukherji, *op. cit.*, pp. 89-92. "An Object Lesson in Constructive Swadeshi", *Dawn*, January 1910.

[87] *Bengalee*, 10 April 1908. Home Political Progs A, March 1911, n. 7, *op. cit.*, para 14.

The story of the early years of the Bengal National College as told by the Mukherjis is one of success and "swift advance"[88]—so much so that the merger with the rival organisation in 1910 and the subsequent decline seems all but inexplicable. Actually negative features and signs of decay had been noticeable from an early date.

Not a single established Indian-owned college broke with the Calcutta University—not even Aswinikumar's Brojomohan Institution or Surendranath's Ripon (despite an explicit promise in the latter case in November 1905).[89] Extremist newspapers like the *Sandhya* and the *Bande Mataram* openly accused the Indian private college authorities of having stabbed the movement in the back out of a selfish desire to keep their grants intact.[90] While many talented men had offered their services during the first years of the movement, by 1909 something like an exodus was taking place—there were twelve resignations from the staff of the Bengal National College during the year preceding the merger.[91] 729 candidates sat for the first public examination held under the auspices of the National Council of Education in July 1906; the corresponding figure in 1909 was only 163.[92]

The great problem, as Rabindranath had foreseen long ago, was employment—students were understandably concerned about the market-value of their 'national' degrees. This was particularly so in the humanities and pure sciences, where the government or private European agencies controlled most of the avenues of employment; and as the progress of swadeshi

[88] Haridas and Uma Mukherji, *op. cit.*, p. 169.

[89] On 17 November 1905 Surendranath Banerji in a meeting at the Field and Academy Club—with tears in his eyes, we are told—rejected as slanderous the charge that he was cool towards national education due to his stake in the Ripon College, and promised that the latter would be the first to seek affiliation with the National University. Kedarnath Dasgupta, *op. cit.*, part II.

[90] *Sandhya*, 12 December 1906—RNP(B) for week ending 15 December 1906. "The True Meaning of the Risley Circular", *Bande Mataram* editorial, 28 May 1907.

[91] *Dawn*, July 1910.

[92] Haridas and Uma Mukherji, *op. cit.*, pp. 139, 145.

industries also fell far short of expectations, the possibility of economic swadeshi and national technical education feeding each other never materialised to any significant extent. An additional disincentive was provided by the reforms undertaken in the official university itself from about this time by Asutosh Mukherji—the compulsory paper in Bengali, the opening of postgraduate teaching departments, an imaginative emphasis on research and the gathering together of extremely talented men.[93] Asutosh Mukherji had no sympathy at all with the National Council as a potential rival to his university—he even privately urged Minto to take action against the politically-unreliable national schools[94]—but in his own way he was realising a part of the constructive programme of the national education movement. In 1910, an official report noted that "antipathy to the university courses" had become a thing of the past—"the university education possesses the greatest attraction and is growing in estimation".[95]

National education could still have retained a patriotic appeal peculiarly its own if its leaders had firmly and boldly aligned themselves with the radical political currents of the age. To some extent this happened in the districts, but the Bengal National College after the first one or two years followed quite a different path. It is difficult to accept without qualification the statement that "In sociological analysis, the NCE represented the extreme or radical aspirations of the day..."[96] No doubt the Bengal National College had Aurobindo as its principal till August 1907 and as lecturer in history and political science from December 1907 to May 1908,[97] but Bepinchandra Pal presumably knew what he was

[93] Cf. N. K. Sinha, *Asutosh Mukherji: A Biographical Study* (1966).

[94] "Dr A. Mukherji tells me that the national schools and private colleges are hotbeds of sedition, and that till we deal with them we can have no permanent peace." Minto to Morley, 30 November 1908—Minto Collection, MI008.

[95] Home Political Progs A, March 1911, n. 7, *op. cit.*, para 10.

[96] Haridas and Uma Mukherji, *op. cit.*, p. 48. What is "sociological" about this description is anybody's guess.

[97] *Ibid*, pp. 84-85.

talking about when he pointed out in 1909 that the National Council, "though it owed its initiation" to "nationalist" (i.e. extremist) efforts, "passed, almost from the very beginning, beyond their sphere of influence, and Aravinda's position as the nominal head of the National College, practically controlled by men of different views and opinions, became more or less anomalous". This happened because "The nationalists are a poor party in India"—a hint about pressure from the donors—and Aurobindo's real position was "not really that of an organiser and initiator, but simply of a teacher of language and history..."[98] By December 1908 Satischandra Mukherji too was out of the picture—and in any case, despite personal friendship with Upadhyay and Aurobindo, his extremism was always somewhat dubious.[99] As early as August 1907, the *Sandhya* was attacking him bitterly for refusing to permit a reception for Sushilkumar Sen, the National College boy caned at Kingsford's orders—"The truth is that Satish Babu and secretly many others of the National College as well are quite stiff with fear."[100] The police at first were very suspicious as to what was going on in the National College and School. Only boys of the "right class" were admitted to it, they complained, relatives of officials being excluded—"We have had actual experiences of

98 Bepinchandra Pal, *Aravinda Ghosh* (1909)—reprinted in *Character-Sketches* (1957), pp. 91, 93.

99 This is what Satischandra wrote on the occasion of the imperial visit during the winter of 1911-12—"The desire to be of signal service to India, India whose greatness and majesty has captivated his heart—the desire to know India more fully and deeply in order that her wishes and aspirations may be better understood and more thoroughly grasped ... such, in brief, represents the higher impelling forces which have almost involuntarily and so soon brought our beloved and illustrious Sovereign back again amongst his Indian People..." "The Personality of our King-Emperor", *Dawn*, January 1912—quoted in Haridas and Uma Mukherji, *op. cit.*, pp. 234-35. Words like these would have made most moderates blush, and the Mukherjis hardly improve matters for their hero by calling this an "outrageously frank statement" notable for its "rare courage".

100 *Sandhya*, 31 August 1907—RNP(B) for week ending 7 September 1907.

this sort when trying to get boys into the National School." Many of the students and some among the teachers were suspected of having links with the revolutionary movement, and the schools in the mufassil tended to be closely associated with the samitis.[101] But on 17 December 1908, Asutosh Chaudhuri and Hirendranath Dutta issued as secretaries of the National Council a formal circular threatening mufassil national schools with stoppage of grants and disaffiliation unless they promised to break off all connections with "samitis or associations other than those which are purely literary".[102] A few months later, the National Council executive passed a resolution "requiring all students (of the college and of the mufassil national schools) to abstain from taking any part or being present" at 7 August meetings—strange fate indeed for a movement which had started as a protest against the Carlyle Circular.[103] By August 1909, Minto had become quite pleased with the National Council—"It is very satisfactory that the National Council of Education has been doing much to keep the students of the national schools under control..."[104]

The movement was much more virile in the districts, and particularly in some parts of East Bengal—but for that the National Council could claim little credit. The *Bengalee* of 30 April 1908 published a sharply-worded letter by 'A Rangpur Nationalist' criticising the National Council for neglecting the mufassil schools while lavishing all aid on the Calcutta college. In the 1908 budget, this letter pointed out, the district schools were allotted only Rs 12,000 out of a total income of Rs 125,636—though the students numbered 270

[101] G. C. Denham's Note on the National Council of Education and National Schools in Bengal, 17 June 1909, pp. 2-5. Home Political Deposit, November 1909, n. 6.

[102] *Dawn*, March 1909.

[103] *Ibid*, October 1909. Aurobindo denounced this order as being no better than a "national Risley Circular"—*Dharma*, 14 Bhadra 1316—August 1909.

[104] Minto to Morley, 26 August 1909. Minto Papers, M1009.

in Calcutta and 4,000 in the mufassil. The *Bande Mataram* warned in this connection about the "growing alienation visible between the central institution and some of the mofussil schools which are necessary to its existence",[105] and the *Dharma* indicated in August 1909 that distrust of radical politics was probably the main cause for this neglect.[106]

In November and December 1906, Monmothanath Majumdar, another *Bengalee* reader, attacked the National Council for its neglect of "female and mass education"; the latter, he pointed out, "lies at the root of all patriotic movements and unless we direct our best energies in this direction all our efforts in other directions are sure to fall to pieces". Patriotism did not involve only the hawking of swadeshi goods and picketing—students must also "take up the cause of the education of their poorer brothers and sisters", start night schools in villages and devote particular attention to the education of Muslim boys.[107] Some efforts along these lines were made in parts of East Bengal, but the National Council could spare only Rs 1,000 in 1908 as grants for the sixty odd primary national schools which had been set up by that year, and contributed nothing at all in 1909. Repeated appeals for affiliation from the numerous primary schools which had been organised by the Faridpur District Association met with no response.[108]

On the related, and crucial, question of the medium of instruction, the National Council had accepted in theory from the beginning the principle of the "imparting of Education, ordinarily through the Vernaculars, English being a compulsory subject".[109] It permitted its examinees to answer questions in Bengali, Hindi and Urdu as well as English[110] and in 1907 requested some of the National College teachers

[105] *Bande Mataram*, 3 May 1908.
[106] *Dharma, op. cit.*
[107] *Bengalee*, 30 November and 7 December 1906.
[108] *Dawn*, February, March 1910.
[109] Clause 1(a) of the Memorandum of Association of the National Council of Education, March 1906. Haridas and Uma Mukherji, *op. cit.*, p. 45.
[110] *Bengalee*, 25 April 1906.

to prepare vernacular textbooks on physics, chemistry and biology.[111] But the scheme of studies as finalised in February 1908 makes it clear that in practice the vernacular medium was in use only up to the fourth year of the seven-year secondary stage of the literary course; thus English retained its monopoly in higher education.[112] This appears less surprising if we remember that Satischandra's voluminous writings on national education reveal remarkably little awareness of the importance of the problem of the medium. He had certainly none of Rabindranath's passion about this issue, and usually lectured to his Dawn Society boys in English.[113]

About twenty years later, the ex-revolutionary Hemchandra Kanungo would launch a direct onslaught on national education as preached and practised in the swadeshi days. The National Council, he would argue then, had failed to even undertake seriously what should have been its principal task —the propagation of modern science and rationalist values in the language of the people, through translations on a mass scale and immediate adoption of the vernacular medium. Instead, all that it had offered to its students was a poor imitation of the orthodox university syllabus,[114] plus a little of technical instruction, a good deal of uncritical worship of India's past glories, and a necessarily eclectic combination

[111] *Dawn*, January 1909. But the rider was added that the textbooks may "also, where desirable, (be) in English"—and there is no information as to whether this scheme ever materialised.

[112] Report on National Schools in Bengal (up to 30 September 1910) —Home Political Progs A, March 1911, n. 7.

[113] "System of Work and Training under the Dawn Society"—*Dawn*, December 1902.

[114] On this point Rabindranath seems to have had similar reservations. "Father was, however, disillusioned after one or two meetings of the (National) Council when he found that the members were more interested in establishing a rival to the Calcutta University, with perhaps a bias towards technical education, than in breaking away from the traditions and conventions of the code of education established by the British in India and boldly adopting a system Indian in character but suited to modern conditions. He ceased to attend any further meetings." Rathindranath Tagore, *On the Edges of Time* (1958), pp. 70-71.

of modern science with traditionalist beliefs and values.[115] The language is extravagant, the criticism harsh and extreme --yet perhaps Hemchandra had a point.

III. National Schools in the Districts

During the winter and spring of 1905-6, while Calcutta leaders deliberated and quarrelled over the educational boycott and composition of the National Council, national schools were springing up in East Bengal districts—at Rangpur, Dacca and Dinajpur in the first instance—to receive expelled students.[116] At Mymensingh and Kishoregunj, the impulse came from a tour by the extremist leaders Bepinchandra, Aurobinda and Subodh Mullick;[117] while some established schools converted themselves into 'national' institutions following the withdrawal of government grants for political or other reasons.[118] Thus the mufassil movement had strong political links from the beginning, and it would be natural to expect that the districtwise distribution of national schools would reflect broadly the pattern of the swadeshi agitation itself.

That this actually happened is vividly revealed by the sharp contrast which soon manifested itself between the two provinces into which Bengal had been divided. At the height of the movement, West Bengal and Bihar could boast of no more than 13 national schools, apart from the Calcutta National College. Monoranjan Guha Thakurta had set up a school at Giridih, and there was another at Bhagalpur of an entirely nonpolitical character. Orissa was quite unaffected. Khulna district had three, Jessore two, and Nadia, 24-Parganas, Calcutta (at Dakshineshwar), Burdwan, Hooghly and Midna-

[115] Hemchandra Kanungo, *Banglay biplab prachesta* (1928), pp. 92, 87, 88.

[116] *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 9 November and 21 November 1905. *Bengalee*, 11 April 1906.

[117] *Bengalee*, 25 April and 1 May 1906.

[118] Such for instance was the origin of the Barabashalaya, Uthari and Amrajuri national schools. Supplementary Report on National Schools from H. Sharp (DPI), No. 524C, 28 October 1909, pp. 5-6.—Home Political Progs A, March 1909, n. 10-11.

pur one each. In September 1910, the total number of pupils (excluding the 200 odd students of the Bengal National College) was estimated at about 450.[119] By December 1911, the number of schools had gone down to six, while the Bengal National College had now only 142 students.[120] The Senhati National School in Khulna at one time was allegedly "practically the same as the local volunteer organisation", and at Jessore the headmaster and some teachers were suspected to have links with Barindrakumar Ghosh;[121] evidently the political militancy of the two districts of the old province bordering East Bengal was reflected in the local national education movement. But by 1910, the official report certified that "most of them (national schools) are being conducted now on lines to which no serious objection need be made". In any case the movement was clearly declining—"ill-staffed, insufficiently financed as the majority of schools are, popular sympathy is obviously leaving them to their fate".[122] After 1911, the government of Bengal decided that further official reports on the national schools of the province were not needed any longer.[123]

Developments in East Bengal offered a startling contrast. In October 1908, about 40 national schools were reported from the new province with a student strength of between 2,500 to 3,000[124]—though relatively few of these were formally affiliated to the National Council.[125] As for their political connections, a perusal of the 1908 reports led Minto to make

[119] Report on National Schools in Bengal (up to 30 September 1910), paras 7-8, 14—Home Political Progs A, March 1911, n. 7.

[120] Report on National Schools in Bengal for year ending 31 December 1911—Home Political Progs A, June 1912, n. 14.

[121] G. C. Denham's Note, *op. cit.*, 17 June 1909—Home Political Deposit, November 1909, n. 6.

[122] Home Political Progs A, March 1911, n. 7, *op. cit.*, paras 9, 11.

[123] Home Political Progs A, June 1912, n. 14, *op. cit.* Notes in the Education Department.

[124] Home Political Progs A, March 1909, n. 10-11, *op. cit.*

[125] The number of schools affiliated to the National Council in both Bengals was only 17 in April 1908. Haridas and Uma Mukherji, *op. cit.*, p. 114.

the rather panicky comment that "It is out of the question that we should tolerate the national schools as they are. If no legislation exists by which we can deal with them, we must create it. . ."[126] By June 1909, thanks no doubt to the ban on the samitis and other repressive measures, "overt sedition" had become less noticeable in the national schools —but their number was still increasing, having gone up to 64. In the latter year, Tippera had 11 national schools, Faridpur 10, Bakargunj 9, Dacca and Mymensingh 8 each, Sylhet 5, Rangpur 4, Pabna 2, and Jalpaiguri, Dinajpur, Rajshahi, Malda, Bogra, Noakhali and Chittagong one each.[127]

An earlier report, dated 8 June 1908, had grouped the national schools in East Bengal into two classes. In the first category it placed the bigger schools, generally situated at "comparatively important places", getting grants from the National Council and seriously trying to conform to its rules. Such schools had been established at Dacca, Mymensingh, Barabashalaya, Kishoregunj, Kamargram, Comilla, Chandpur, Noakhali, Dinajpur, Rangpur, Malda and Sylhet;[128] most of them "appear to have added some kind of industrial or technical course to their curriculum"[129]—and "nearly all came into existence at the beginning of the agitation, one in 1905, seven in 1906 (generally early), and only four in 1907".[130] These represented the nationalist alternative to the officially-recognised system of high and middle English schools. The National Council grants ranged from Rs 300 to Rs 720 annually,[131] and the schools had to supplement

[126] Note by Minto, 7 December 1908—Home Political Progs A, March 1909, n. 10-11.

[127] Report on National Schools in Eastern Bengal and Assam (1 October 1908, 30 June 1909)—Memorandum from the Government of E. Bengal and Assam. No. 10169-172 SB, 15 December 1909, Home Political Progs A, March 1911, n. 5, 178-89.

[128] Report on National Schools in the Province of Eastern Bengal and Assam, from H. Sharp (D.P.I.) No. 431, 8 June 1908. p. 34.—Home Political Progs A, March 1909, n. 10-11.

[129] Supplementary Report, No. 524C, 28 October 1908, pp. 6-7—*Ibid.*

[130] Report of 8 June 1908—*op. cit.*

[131] Haridas and Uma Mukherji, *op. cit.*, p. 119.

them through a variety of ingenious methods. To take one example, the total receipts of the Chandpur National School in 1908 amounted to Rs 3359-5-8; of this, Rs 400 came as grants-in-aid, Rs 1087-7-6 as fees, Rs 1037-9-6 from donations, Rs 327 as monthly subscriptions, Rs 280-4-9 from sales by the technical department (Chandpur had an excellent carpentry unit), and Rs 165-10-0 as "mushti-bhiksha" (mass collections)—there was also a balance of Rs 61-5-9 from the previous year.[132] Funds for the schools came also from local organisations like the Barisal Swadesh Bandhab, the Sebak Samiti of Comilla and the Faridpur District Association. Zamindari support was helpful in certain cases, but a more common source of income was a "tax levied upon their clients by pleaders and mukhtiars, who are almost invariably the chief supporters of these schools, usually at the rate of an anna per head".[133] National schools of this first variety were described as "the most turbulent, as well as the most thriving".[134] While the suspicion that the technical departments were serving sometimes as a cover for bomb-making may or may not have been unfounded,[135] there can be no doubt at all about the close links between the samiti movement and national schools headed or guided by men like Kaliprasanna Dasgupta (Mymensingh), Surendranath Sen (Kishoregunj) and Pulinbehari Das (Wari, in Dacca).[136] In 1908 the Dinajpur school was described as the "most notorious of all", due to the involvement of its boys in the Lazarus assault case;[137] the Sonarang school founded in April 1908 by Makhanlal Sen was to prove far more formidable in later years, and the Rowlatt Report pinpointed it as a principal recruiting centre and base for the Dacca Anushilan.[138]

[132] *Dawn*, March 1909.

[133] Supplementary Report of 28 October 1908, pp. 7-8—*op. cit.*

[134] Report of 8 June 1908—*op. cit.*

[135] Supplementary Report of 28 October 1908, *op. cit.*

[136] Report of 8 June 1908, para 12, *op. cit.* Cf. also below, Chapter VII.

[137] Report of 8 June 1908—*op. cit.*

[138] Home Political Progs A, March 1911, n. 5, *op. cit.*—Summary of

Schools of the second type were those established at more obscure places in the mufassil away from the major towns; these were generally a later development—only one being founded in 1906, eight in 1907, and eleven in 1908.[139] Though small in size, getting little or no aid or even recognition from the National Council of Education, and less prominent in politics, these schools made the authorities extremely nervous. As official reports pointed out with real political sense, "The second phase of the movement is capable of much more dangerous development. This is the attempt made at the close of last year and the beginning of this, to extend these schools to the villages and get hold of primary education...it would appear that this is a phase of the movement to which (should it succeed—which is very doubtful) very serious attention should be given."[140] What had alarmed the officials were the signs of a breach in the traditional barriers separating the bhadralok Hindu from the masses. Particular mention was made of the Uthari school in Mymensingh, "where considerable efforts were made...to secure Muhammadan pupils"; Ramara in Faridpur, where the national school met in a Muslim house; and Dhalgram in the same district, a village "inhabited almost entirely by Namasudras", who had been persuaded by their swadeshi-minded landlords to convert their primary school into a national one. All the 37 pupils of this Dhalgram school were, consequently, Namasudras.[141]

As might have been expected, this movement to "nationalise" primary education in the villages[142] developed first in Barisal. Aswinikumar Dutta at one time was in communication with the National Council in connection with some 200 primary schools apparently controlled by the Swadesh

Information, Sedition Committee (Rowlatt) Report (1918), Chapter IV.

[139] Report of 8 June 1908, p. 34—*op. cit.*

[140] *Ibid*, pp. 35-36. Supplementary Report of 28 October 1908, p. 4.—*cp. cit.*

[141] Supplementary Report, pp. 4, 7—*op. cit.*

[142] The phrase is used in *Ibid*, p. 4.

Bandhab Samiti.[143] The political connection was probably somewhat tenuous—what seems to have happened was that Basantakumar Ghatak, a dismissed headmaster employed by the samiti, had gone "about the country offering small grants to rival and undeserving pathshalas to which the board has refused aid..."[144] Ghatak was later jailed on a charge of misappropriation of District Board funds,[145] and the ban on the samiti must have been an even bigger blow. Yet a detailed account of primary national schools published in the *Dawn* of January-May 1910 listed fifteen such pathshalas as still functioning in Bakargunj district, with an estimated student strength of about 650, of whom at least 177 were Namasudras and 50 Muslims.[146] In the neighbouring district of Faridpur, the District Association led by Ambicacharan Majumdar was running 25 primary schools by 1910 with about 1,200 pupils. A proper grants system had been established, despite the National Council's rejection of all appeals for affiliation and funds. Such schools had been set up in 13 out of the 14 thanas of the district, and in Gopalgunj, the thana with the highest percentage of Namasudras, a night school had also been started.[147] The Malda Jatiya Shiksha Samiti, established in June 1907 with rather original ideas by Benoykumar Sarkar and Bepinbehari Ghosh (along with a Muslim vicepresident —Moulvi Mohammed Nur Bux), had set up eight schools with 748 students by June 1908, three of them primary.[148]

[143] G. C. Denham's Note, 17 June 1909, p. 5.—*op. cit.*

[144] Report of 8 June 1908, p. 33.—*op. cit.*

[145] Supplementary Report, p. 14—*op. cit.*

[146] "Movement for Education of Depressed Classes and of Masses Generally"—*Dawn*, February 1910.

[147] *Ibid*, April 1910.

[148] The Malda organisation had a committee of 45 members with many of them coming from the rural areas. It had an examination system of its own, and unlike its Calcutta prototype tried to concentrate its efforts on mass education. The literary research department attached to the samiti also did very good work in collecting local traditions and folk-songs. *Ibid*, May 1910. Haridas and Uma Mukherji, *op. cit.*, pp. 122-26.

The *Dawn* listed another 35 national primary schools existing in the other districts of Bengal—11 in Tippera, 4 in Mymensingh, 3 in Jessore, 2 each in Dacca, Noakhali, Bogra, Pabna and Hooghly, and one each in Rangpur, Dinajpur, Nadia, Midnapur, Howrah, Khulna and Chittagong.[149] Efforts to set up national schools for girls were reported from Mymensingh and Rajshahi.[150]

Compared to the dimensions of the problem of mass education, such efforts were obviously little more than a drop in the ocean. The report of June 1908 had drawn comfort from the facts that "even the most lavish endowments would not provide the wherewithal for making any impression in this direction", and that in any case "the *Bhadralok* are peculiarly indifferent to elementary schools".[151] "So-called national pathshalas, or primary schools still appear, but have usually a shortlived existence", stated the Report on National Schools next year.[152]

The story of national education thus conforms with the general pattern of the swadeshi movement of which it formed a part. At its height, the movement had seemed to have been on the verge of transcending the bounds of bhadralok society. But the traditional preconceptions, prejudices and social walls ultimately proved too strong, and these imposed a bias towards higher education which in the end turned out to be a blind alley. One or two model institutions, at Santiniketan or Calcutta, surviving as examples of nonpolitical constructive swadeshi; a number of national schools in East Bengal serving as seminaries and recruiting grounds for revolutionary terrorism—such were the remnants of national education in Bengal in the decade succeeding 1910. Boycott of government schools and colleges and a mass approach to national education virtually disappear—till the new upsurge of the national movement in the noncooperation days.

149 *Dawn*, *op. cit.*, May 1910.
150 Supplementary Report of 28 October 1908, p. 5.—*op. cit.*
151 Report of June 1908, pp. 35-36—*op. cit.*
152 Home Political Progs A, March 1911, n. 5—*op. cit.*, p. 1.

Chapter Five

LABOUR UNREST AND TRADE UNIONS

I. Sources

Labour unrest constitutes the most neglected—indeed, an all-but-forgotten—aspect of the swadeshi saga. Dr. R. C. Majumdar in his fairly detailed survey of the period dismisses the subject in six lines;[1] the Mukherjis ignore it altogether.[2] Even accounts of the Indian trade union movement generally mention the period only in passing,[3] and the impression given is that the real history of organised labour in our country began with the post-1918 upsurge. Soviet historians form the only exception to this general tendency, and their recently-translated volume on Tilak and his times contains several chapters emphasising—perhaps even to a slightly exaggerated degree—the role of labour in swadeshi days.[4]

[1] R. C. Majumdar, *History of the Freedom Movement in India*, Volume II (1962), p. 59.

[2] Haridas and Uma Mukherji, *India's Fight for Freedom, or The Swadeshi Movement (1905-06)*, 1958.

[3] Rajanikanta Das, *The Labour Movement in India* (Berlin 1923), Chapter II contains a few lines about press and transport strikes in Bengal during the swadeshi period. Gopal Ghosh *Indian Trade Union Movement* (1961) has about a page on the same subject, and mentions the press strikes of 1905, the Printers Union, and the Eastern Bengal State Railway strike of 1907 (pp. 53-54). The five-page account of the Bengal strikes in V. B. Karnik, *Strikes in India* (1967), pp. 38-43, is based almost entirely on the Soviet work referred to in footnote 4 below. The Bombay strike of July 1908, however, has naturally attracted more notice—cf. D. C. Home, "Bombay Worker's First Political Strike"—in *New Age Monthly*, June 1953.

[4] I. M. Reisner and N. M. Goldberg (ed.), *Tilak and the Struggle for Indian Freedom* (New Delhi, 1966). Cf. particularly the articles by

Extremely valuable for the Bombay strike of 1908 and its antecedents, this volume however is much less impressive in its account of Bengal, and it is obvious that the authors had at their disposal only a very limited range of sources (e.g. among newspapers, the files of the *Times of India* alone).

The rich literature of memoirs and biographies relating to Swadeshi Bengal contains only a few stray references to labour matters.[5] But quite a different impression of relative importance is conveyed by the contemporary sources, official as well as nonofficial. Thus an official survey entitled *Administration of Bengal Under Andrew Fraser, 1903-1908* contains an entire section on "Industrial Unrest", which is stated to have been "a marked feature of the quinquennium... In many of the strikes professional agitators were prominent, and the power of organisation which was so apparent in the poli-

E. N. Komarov ("Social Thought in Bengal in the Late 19th and Early 20th Centuries"); A. I. Levkovsky ("The Labour Movement and the Development of the Freedom Struggle, 1905-08"); L. A. Gordon ("Social and Economic Conditions of Bombay Workers on the Eve of the 1908 Strike"); and A. I. Chicherov ("Tilak's Trial and the Bombay Political Strike of 1908"). I have not been able to see the earlier article (in Russian) by A. V. Raikov on the "Labour Movement in India, 1905-1908" in *Sovetskii Vostokovedenii*, No. 11, Moscow 1957.

[5] The most important of these are:

(a) Hemendraprasad Ghosh, *Congress* (1920), p. 167—giving an account of the East Indian Railway strike of 1906 and of the leadership given to it by Premtosh Bose;

(b) Jadugopal Mukherji, *Biplabi jibaner smriti* (1956), pp. 219, 260, 252-54, 271-75—refers to strikes during 1905-6 by cart-drivers, Burn clerks, tram conductors, and press and railway employees, and also mentions allegedly 'socialistic' ideas preached by Prabhatkusum Roychaudhuri and Apurbakumar Ghosh;

(c) Dr Bhupendranath Dutta, *Bharater dwitiya swadhinata sangram* (1949), pp. 147-48—contains a very valuable note on the little-known Apurbakumar Ghosh; and

(d) Krishnakumar Mitra, *Atmacharit* (1937), p. 254—describes the role of Aswinicoomar Banerji in organising a hartal by cart-drivers on 16 October 1905.

tical agitation was equally noticeable. Both were new factors in the industrial history of the province. The industrial agitators were mostly briefless Bengali Hindu barristers, who made it their business to found and preside over Unions... Such Unions were formed for Indian press employees, mill-hands and railway servants; strikes were started or encouraged, and the strikers were backed up as long as their funds lasted."[6] The Fortnightly Reports from the Bengal government during 1906-7 contain occasional references to labour disputes, while the Government Press and Railway strikes disrupted public business sufficiently to earn a prominent place in the home department files of the Government of India. Contemporary newspapers give abundant information about strikes, big and small—in fact, the coverage accorded to labour news would compare quite favourably with that given by the non-left-wing press of today. It has been my good fortune also to have been given access to the private papers of one of those allegedly briefless barristers who are accused in the above-quoted government report of having fomented labour troubles. The extremely well-preserved papers of Aswini-coomar Banerji include some two dozen letters and documents bearing directly on labour matters, as well as an interesting autobiographical fragment.[7] Surjyakumar Ghoshal, an assistant of his working in the industrial centre of Budge Budge, kept a file of press-cuttings on labour news which has also proved invaluable.

II. Labour Conditions and Bhadralok Attitude

By 1906-7, the numerical strength of the modern industrial working class in Bengal had passed the quarter-million mark.

[6] *Administration of Bengal under Andrew Fraser, 1903-08*, p. 24.

[7] The autobiographical note is written in third person, but I have been assured by his grandson that the handwriting is Aswinibabu's.

The annual Report on the Administration of Bengal gives the following figures :[8]

	1904-5	*1905-6*	*1906-7*
Average daily number of workers employed in factories (defined by the Factory Act of 1891 as units using mechanical power and employing at least 50 persons)	224,241	234,725	266,205

This is exclusive of tea-plantations and coal mines, which employed 41,095 and 74,071 persons respectively in Bengal in 1905-6.[9]

A government report[10] dated September 1907 gives the following industrywise break-up for units employing more than fifty workers in Bengal :

	Average number employed daily in 1905
Cotton mills (10)	11,765
Jute mills (35)	143,429
Jute presses	30,653
Iron & brass foundries	15,159
Railway workshops	25,698
Printing presses (20 private— 26 of them in Calcutta; 2 government)	5,461
Dockyards	6,999
Arms & ammunition	6,764

A very considerable and increasing part of this proletariat, however, was non-Bengali—thus while the jute mills had been started mainly with local hands, Hindustanis from Bihar and United Provinces were fast replacing them. No less than two-

[8] Report on the Administration of Bengal (1905-06), pp. 70-71. *Ibid* (1906-07), pp. 75-76.
[9] *Ibid* (1905-06), pp. 67-68.
[10] Government of Bengal, General Miscellaneous Progs B, 1907, September, n. 68-69.—Statement on Industrial Labour for 1901-1905.

thirds of the population of Howrah city consisted of immigrants, mostly upcountrymen.[11] The contrast with Bombay with its predominantly Maharashtrian working class is evident, and Surendranath or Bepinchandra could never hope to gain the popularity of a Tilak among the labourers. At the same time, the almost total absence of an indigenous industrial bourgeoisie in Bengal was a factor pulling strongly in the opposite direction. Industrial discontent in foreign-owned enterprises readily and inevitably acquired a national character.

The *Report of the Indian Factory Labour Commission (1908)* gives a vivid and often horrifying description of the conditions of the Indian working class. Even the paltry restrictions imposed by the Factory Acts of 1881 and 1891 on the employment of children and women (a 7-hour-day for children aged 9-14; an 11-hour maximum and prohibition of nightwork for women)[12] were seldom respected—hardly surprising this, when we remember that the 1891 Act had provided for a grand total of six factory inspectors for the whole of India.[13] Working hours of adult males were still entirely unregulated except for a midday break of half an hour and a holiday on Sundays—and "throughout India, except in Bombay, it is the general custom to call the operatives, or a certain number of them, to clean machinery on Sunday".[14] In 1905, with the introduction of electricity in a number of Bombay mills coinciding with a boom in the China and home markets (the latter partly a product of the boycott movement), the working hours were extended to 14½ or even 15, till strikes and riots together with loud protests from Lancashire and Anglo-Indian journals like the *Times of India* compelled some reduction.[15]

[11] *Howrah District Gazetteer (1909)*, pp. 29-30, 115.

[12] Provisions of the Factory Act of 1891. Dr Bipan Chandra, *The Rise and Growth of Economic Nationalism in India* (New Delhi, 1966), pp. 343-44. Chapter VIII of this work gives an extremely able account of nationalist attitudes on labour problems down to 1905.

[13] *Report of the Indian Factory Labour Commission 1908* (henceforth referred to as RIFLC 1908), Volume I, p. 67.

[14] *Ibid*, p. 13.

[15] *Ibid*, p. 7.

In view of the concern often expressed in ruling circles for the Bombay operative working for Indian masters, it is interesting to note that the Factory Commission found conditions in the British-owned Bengal jute mills to be in some respects even worse. These worked "from 5 a.m. to 8 p.m. without stoppage", and while a complicated shift system allowed the spinners to work for 11 hours only on an average, "the weavers on the other hand are invariably on duty for the full number of hours during which the mill runs". Mill-owners often "cribbed time", and in such cases "their actual employment may extend to 16 hours a day. No regular mid-day interval is given in any of the jute mills."[16] The Calcutta jute weaver in fact seems to have been worse off from this point of view than anyone else, except for those employed in ginning and rice mills (where 15 to 18 hours was the rule during heavy seasons) and in factories not covered by the act, where "it is a common practice to work women nominally for as long as 18 hours".[17] As for child labour, "The conditions prevailing in the cotton mills, though bad, are very much better than those obtaining in the jute mills of Bengal. There children who are obviously under 9 years of age, many of them not more than 6 or 7 years old, are employed for 7-8 hours a day, and the proportion of under-age children employed as half-timers probably amounts to 30-40 per cent of the total half-timer staff."[18] As regards wages, those of cotton weavers ranged from Rs 10 to Rs 35 a month; jute workers got a little more.[19] The average weight of mill-operatives compared unfavourably with that of prisoners.[20] Trade union rights were entirely nonexistent prior to 1926.

After this array of depressing facts, it is to put it mildly, surprising to see the Factory Commission majority rejecting the proposal for a direct restriction on the hours of adult labour, since this would be "repugnant to the great majority of capitalists both in India and abroad, who have invested, or are considering the question of investing, money in

[16] *Ibid*, p. 9. [17] *Ibid*, pp. 11-12.
[18] *Ibid*, p. 16. [19] *Ibid*, p. 22. [20] *Ibid*, Appendix C.

India".[21] We are even informed that "operatives are in fact the masters of the situation", and that women workers have "excellent" physique.[22] Thus the commission members can hardly be accused of a proworker bias; all the more damaging therefore the facts presented by it.

Such inhuman conditions naturally provoked occasional protests, riots and strikes by workers long before the appearance on the scene of the bhadralok philanthropist or labour organiser. There were twenty-five important strikes in Bombay and Madras during the years 1882-90.[23] The Soviet historian L. A. Gordon mentions big strikes by Bombay mill-workers during 1892-93 and 1901.[24] For Bengal, Gopal Ghosh's brief account refers to strikes by Howrah station workers and East Indian Railway audit department clerks (1862); Calcutta palki-bearers (1863); tongawallas (1873); and operatives of the Budge Budge Jute Mill (1895, 1896).[25] Organisation naturally lagged far behind, and even in 1908 the Factory Commission noted the inability of workers "to combine over any large area with the object of securing a common end by concerted action. One of the main difficulties experienced at present, when unrest appears among the workers, is in ascertaining the causes of that unrest. Frequently no definite demands are formulated, no grievances are stated, no indication is given as to the cause of the discontent; the operatives simply leave work in a body, or more commonly they drop off one by one without explanation, and accept employment under more congenial conditions in other factories."[26]

Though strikes were nothing new, their number, organisation and political connections during 1905-8 make the period a distinctive phase in the history of our labour move-

[21] *Ibid*, p. 32.
[22] *Ibid*, p. 19, 24.
[23] Rajanikanta Das, *op. cit.*, Chapter VII.
[24] L. A. Gordon in I. M. Reisner and N. M. Goldberg, *op. cit.*, pp. 535-37.
[25] Gopal Ghosh, *op. cit.*, pp. 44-45, 53.
[26] RIFLC 1908, Vol. I, p. 20.

ment. The evidence collected by the Factory Commission reveals the gradual crystallisation of a demand for reduced working-hours—a 12-hour or sometimes an 11-hour day.[27] But perhaps the most important causes of labour discontent during these years were the sudden and sharp rise in prices.[28] The upward curve was steepest during 1905-8 and while a correlation with the entire swadeshi upsurge is dangerous though tempting, the link with labour unrest seems obvious enough—additional wage-claims were frequently being put forward during these years on the ground of the high price of foodstuffs, and government employees were demanding grain compensation allowances.[29] Strikes sparked off by racial issues—ill-treatment by white bosses, discrimination in conditions of work and pay—were also becoming frequent in British-owned factories and firms. The grievances on this score were old, no doubt, but the new swadeshi gospel of national dignity and selfreliance led to vocal and organised protests being made where previously there might have been sullen acquiescence. Rabindranath Tagore in a famous speech delivered at the height of the 1905 upsurge spoke of the long-suffering impoverished clerks who have suddenly decided not to tolerate insults any longer.[30] The reference is probably to the strike of the Burn clerks in September 1905. The Bombay strike of July 1908 which Lenin hailed stands on a level by itself due to its purely political character, but even in Bengal political factors were not entirely absent. The series of strikes at the Fort Gloster Jute Mills (Bauria), for instance, seems to

[27] *Ibid*, Vol. II. Evidence of witness No. 53 (K. A. Keluskar, secretary of the Maratha Aikyechhoo Sabha, Bombay); Parel mill-operatives (p. 156); witness No. 176 (Kazi Zahir-ud-din Ahmed, Kankinara); and witnesses 192-193 (Budge Budge Jute Mill weavers and spinners. produced by A. C. Banerji).

[28] Cf. above, Chapter I, f.n. 65.

[29] See below, Section III.

[30] "Vijaya-sammilan"—*Bangadarshan*, Kartik 1312 (1905), R.R.IV, p. 471.

have been provoked by the management objecting to the workers putting on rakhis on 16 October 1905.[31]

The period 1905-8 is remarkable in Bengal's labour history above all for the emergence of the middle-class labour agitator, trying (mainly out of nationalist motives) to give organised form to the spontaneous discontent of the workers and employees of British-owned enterprises. A brief survey of bhadralok attitudes towards labour prior to 1905 is necessary to appreciate the novelty and significance of this development.

Efforts to improve the material and moral conditions of Indian workers had been started by a handful of philanthropists from the 1870s. In Bombay, S. S. Bengalee drafted a bill to regulate working hours in April 1878. N. M. Lokhande organised several big meetings of mill-hands in 1884 and 1890 to plead for reduced hours and a weekly holiday. He launched the Anglo-Marathi weekly *Din Bandhu* in 1880 to support the cause of the workers, and started the Bombay Mill-hands Association in 1890. Despite its name, however, this was not really a trade union, and existed largely on paper—with Lokhande acting as a "volunteer Adviser to any mill-hand who may come to him".[32] In Bengal, the Brahmo social reformer Sasipada Banerji combined a crusade for the education of women with efforts to improve the conditions of factory workers. He started night schools for labourers; a Workingmen's Club in 1870; a monthly journal *Bharat Sramajeebi* in 1874 (for which Sibnath Sastri wrote a poem, beginning with the lines "Awake, Arise, O Workingman"); and an institute for workers in Baranagore in 1876.[33] This was still active in 1906, when Sibnath Sastri opened a library for it.[34] The Maratha Aikyechhoo

[31] *Bengalee*, 18 October 1905.

[32] Rajanikanta Das, *op. cit.*, Chapter II. Bipan Chandra, *op. cit.*, pp. 326, 341.

[33] Charles H. Heimsath, *Indian Nationalism and Hindu Social Reform* (1964), pp. 269-72. Atulchandra Gupta, *Studies in the Bengal Renaissance* (1958), article by Jogananda Das, p. 493.

[34] *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 14 February 1906.

Sabha conducted educational and temperance work among Bombay mill-hands from 1882.[35] We also hear of a Mahomedan Association among jute-mill workers at Kankinara (near Calcutta), founded in 1895 and led by Kazi Zahir-ud-din Ahmed and Mohammed Zulfaquar Hyder, which had a regular membership list and raised funds to improve mosques, give alms on ceremonial occasions and provide sickness benefits.[36] Such philanthropic efforts were quite distinct from the spontaneous strikes which broke out from time to time, and men like Bengalee, Lokhande or Banerji were also more or less cut off from the mainstream of the national movement of their days.

As Dr Bipan Chandra has shown with a wealth of detail, the nationalist attitude prior to 1905 was a compound of general indifference, positive hostility to measures like the Factory Acts when these were felt to be threatening the interests of the nascent Indian bourgeoisie, and sympathy for Indians working in British-owned factories, mines and plantations.[37] Only an overriding concern for the future of India's cotton textile industry can explain (though hardly excuse) the callous brutality of statements like that of the 'radical' *Amrita Bazar Patrika* on 2 September 1875: "A larger death rate amongst our operatives is far more preferable to the collapse of this rising industry... We can, after the manufacturers are fully established, seek to protect the operatives."[38] In sharp though not unnatural contrast[39] was the active sympathy for Indians employed and exploited by the British. The Bengal nationalists conducted a memorable campaign against Assam tea-planters, urging government intervention and even on occasion middle-class selfhelp in the

[35] RIFLC 1908, Volume II, pp. 86-89.

[36] *Ibid*, Volume II, pp. 263-65, 270.

[37] Bipan Chandra, *op. cit.*, Chapter VIII (Labour).

[38] *Ibid*, p. 336.

[39] In fairness to the Indians, it must be remembered that the standpoint of Anglo-Indian and Lancashire circles was equally inconsistent —loud protests against exploitation in Bombay mills, tactful silence over working conditions in Assam plantations or Bengal coal mines.

shape of a boycott of tea—though no one, significantly enough, seems to have thought in terms of helping to start a trade union movement of the coolies themselves.[40] The Great Indian Peninsular Railway signallers' strike of May 1899 attained a level of organisation hitherto unknown in India, and the middle-class response to it took the correspondingly higher form of press-campaigns to raise funds for the strikers.[41] Even in far-off Bengal we find Surendranath Tagore writing to Aswinicoomar Banerji asking for his participation in a campaign for funds launched by his cousin Sarala through her journal *Bharati*. It would be helpful if Banerji could manage to get an appeal printed in the *Indian Mirror*, he suggests.[42]

This difference in attitude towards labour in Indian and British enterprises persisted in the swadeshi period. The *Daily Hitavadi* supported the formation of unions in foreign-owned mills alone—"The fact that these unions are being organised only in those concerns which are under European superintendence is a proof that at last the people of India have acquired from their rulers a commendable trait of character—viz, a love for men of their own race."[43] Virtually unanimous support for the East Indian Railway strike of July-September 1906 went hand-in-hand with stout opposition to British moves for an inquiry into working conditions in Indian textile mills.[44] Hemendralal Chaudhuri, manager

[40] Bipan Chandra, *op. cit.*, p. 372.
[41] *Ibid*, pp. 379-85.
[42] Surendranath Tagore to Aswinicoomar Banerji, 13 June 1899, in *Private Papers of A. C. Banerji.*
[43] *Daily Hitavadi*, 22 July 1906—RNP(B) for the week ending 28 July 1906.
[44] All newspapers except the *Englishman*, *Pioneer*, and *Indian Daily News* were stated to be sympathising with the EIR strike by the *Daily Hitavadi*, 17 August 1905—RNP(B) for the week ending 25 August 1906. At about the same time, the *Hitavadi* of 5 August 1906 was deploring British parliamentary questions on Indian mill-hands—English millowners, it moaned, intended "to deprive their fellow-traders in India of their bread". The *Sandhya*—probably the most militant supporter of the EIR strike—ruled out in its issue of 2 August

of the Banga Luxmi Cotton Mills—the pride of Swadeshi Bengal—stated before the Factory Commission that "it is not at all desirable to raise the minimum age... beyond nine". He strongly opposed any curtailment of working hours (his own enterprise had a 13-hour day), considered the appointment of full-time medical men to be "unnecessary", and "approved of girls of eight working in the mills, and thought that women should be allowed to work as long as the men".[45] In a minute of dissent to the Factory Commission Report, Dr T. M. Nair frankly stated the difficulties still being faced by the philanthropist advocate of the cause of labour.[46] "At the present time, when the cry of industrial regeneration of India is in the air, it may not be a very popular policy for an Indian to advocate restrictive industrial legislation for his country... in my tour throughout India, I found that my countrymen as a class were more unsympathetic and hard employers of labour than the European manufacturers... Even some of the most enlightened and educated Indian gentlemen, with whom I discussed industrial questions, had not a single word of sympathy with the labourers to express. They were all anxious to make up for lost time and to push on their industrial ventures and to accumulate wealth. But as for the workers, they were part of the machinery of production and nothing more. To me this discovery came as an unpleasant and disheartening surprise..."[47]

1906 any conflict "between the higher and the lower classes" in India, since both were impregnated with the same high religious and moral ideals, and declared that "the Indian labourer is a much higher being in civilisation and moral culture than a European labourer". "Feringhee" ill-treatment therefore was the sole cause of labour troubles (RNP(B) for the week ending 11 August 1906).

[45] RIFLC (1908), Volume II, pp. 242-44.

[46] *Ibid*, Volume I, pp. 81-114. Dr Nair's powerful plea for restrictions on the hours of adult labour later became the basis of the Factory Act of 1911, which fixed a 12-hour day for adult males in textile mills. Cf. D. R. Gadgil, *The Industrial Evolution of India* (Fourth edition, 1942). p. 275.

[47] RIFLC (1908), Vol. I, p. 104.

In Bengal, however, where British capital dominated the industrial field, the swadeshi period was marked by a qualitatively higher nationalist response to labour unrest in foreign-owned enterprises. Sympathy was no longer confined to occasional newspaper articles or even collection of funds. Legal aid was extended to victimised workmen, meetings were organised in support of strikes, and attempts were made to set up more or less stable trade unions. Four names stand out in this context—Aswinicoomar Banerji, Prabhatkusum Roychaudhuri, Premtosh Bose, Athanasius Apurbakumar Ghosh—and since these pioneers of Bengal's labour movement have been almost forgotten, brief biographical sketches may not be irrelevant here.

Aswinicoomar Banerji (1866-1945), politically the most prominent of the four, was the eldest son of a well-known Brahmin family of Arbandi village in Nadia. He studied law in England between 1886 and 1891, and on returning to Calcutta soon established himself as a successful barrister.[48] In 1893 he married Swarnaprabha, daughter of Saratkumar and a grand-daughter of Debendranath Tagore. From about this time Aswinicoomar "began interesting himself in public men and affairs", and "wrote a series of letters which were published in the *Indian Mirror*";[49] carefully preserving press-cuttings of these himself.[50] The letters are often sharply critical of the Congress leaders of the 1890s, and while a personal note is not difficult to detect (e.g., the complaint that "at present, so far as I have been able to ascertain, willing young men are kept at arms length"[51]), it is still interesting to see 'Bon-de-Paday' calling for a boy-

[48] "Aswinikumar Bandopadhyay"—*Prajapati*, 1336, Sravana-Bhadra (1929). A brief life-sketch was published in this monthly journal and preserved by A. C. Banerji among his private papers.

[49] Unpublished Autobiographical Note written by A. C. Banerji in third person, after his wife's death in 1940.

[50] Four volumes of such newspaper cuttings are available, covering the years 1893-97, 1897-1902, 1902-7 and 1907-12. I have found these extremely useful.

[51] "Our Public Men" by 'A. Bon-de-Paday', *Indian Mirror*, 11 September 1894.

cott in protest against the cotton excise duty of 1896;[52] denouncing the timidity of the leaders in face of the sentence on Tilak in 1897;[53] appealing for "selfreliance" in the intellectual, physical, political and economic fields in a lecture at Comilla in February 1903;[54] and suggesting "passive resistance" in the form of a rate-payers' strike to fight the new officialised Calcutta Corporation in November of the same year.[55] Press-cuttings and letters show A. C. Banerji to have been extremely active in 1904 as one of the chief organisers of the Association for the Advancement of Scientific and Technical Education started by Jogendrachandra Ghosh. He was also associated with the Anushilan Samiti during its early 'respectable' phase, being a close personal friend of Pramathanath Mitter.[56]

With the beginning of the boycott movement, Aswinicoomar shot into prominence as a defender of swadeshi cases, a fiery orator and a man of considerable independence and imagination.[57] Above all, in the words of the inspector-

[52] *Indian Mirror*, 13 February 1896.

[53] Three letters, signed 'Bon-de-Paday', which appeared in *Indian Mirror*, 18 August, 17 October and 19 October 1897.

[54] *Indian Mirror*, 21 February 1903, reporting A. C. Banerji's Comilla Town Hall lecture on "Young Bengal—What Its Duties Are", delivered on 14 February 1903.

[55] The suggestion was made in a letter by 'Bon-de-Paday' denouncing the return of Nalinbehari Sircar—one of the 28 who had resigned in 1899—to the Calcutta Corporation, published in *Indian Mirror*, 19 November 1903. But A. C. Banerji himself became a Corporation Councillor in 1906.

[56] A. C. Banerji in his autobiographical note mentions his connection with the Anushilan Samiti "till it was disbanded by legislation". Bhupendranath Dutta also refers to him as one of its early members (*op. cit.*, pp. 101, 181). I found twenty-seven letters of P.Mitter to A. C. Banerji written between 1896 and 1907 among the latter's private papers. They are very intimate but disappointingly nonpolitical in tone.

[57] Thus at the Albert Hall meeting of 5 August 1905 A. C. Banerji attacked the organisers of the coming Town Hall rally for arranging the decorations through Hall and Andersons, and eventually these had to be replaced—a first, though not very crucial, challenge to Surendranath's leadership, as the *Indian Daily News* noted on 10 August (*Indian Mirror*, 11 and 12 August 1905). At meetings at Entally and Santipur

general of police, C. Stevenson-Moore, A. C. Banerji "threw himself heart and soul into the strike movement", taking "an active part" in the Burn, press, tramway and jute mill strikes of the autumn of 1905. "He and Bepin Chandra Pal. . .are undoubtedly the most dangerous among the agitators", states this early police report.[58] By 1907 he had become prominent enough to get a request from Madras for a photograph "to be hung along with Mr Lall, Paul and Ball".[59] Aswinicoomar, however, did not fully live up to this early reputation of radicalism. Personally, his connections remained much more with the middle of the road Motilal Ghosh or even Surendranath rather than the extremist leaders.[60] His reentry into corporation politics as councillor for ward number IX in early 1906 must have surprised many; much more damaging was the abject apology by means of which he wriggled out of a sedition charge in November 1907.[61] Like many others in Bengal, Banerji tried to avoid taking sides after the Surat split, and as pre-

in the last week of September 1905 A. C. Banerji suggested an annual Satyapir festival to promote Hindu-Muslim unity (*Indian Mirror*, 22 September; *Hindoo Patriot*, 3 October). The idea attracted some interest and was welcomed by Surendranath in a private letter to Aswinicoomar dated 24 September 1905, but was never taken up in earnest.

[58] Note by Bengal IG of Police C. Stevenson-Moore, 2 December 1905. Home Public Progs A, June 1906, n. 172.

[59] Letter of S. Sanjeev Rao (representative, *Madras Standard*) to A. C. Banerji, 12 October 1907.

[60] A. C. Banerji's extant private papers contain 46 letters—rather formal in tone—from Surendranath (1896-1922); 24 letters in a more intimate vein from Motilal Ghosh (1905-11); two letters each from Brahmabandhab Upadhyay and Aurobindo; and only a single brief note from Bepinchandra Pal. But of course many letters—particularly the more politically dangerous—may have been destroyed.

[61] Home Political Progs A, August 1908, n. 23-29 (Prosecution of A. C. Banerji under section 124 and 153 A, Indian Penal Code). In fairness to Banerji, it must be added that the apology was given under the advice of top political leaders like Motilal Ghosh, who assured him in an (undated) letter that he had "no reason to be ashamed" of his statement. But this did not save him from sharp newspaper criticism.

sident of the Nadia district conference at Santipur in November 1909 stated he was 'neither a moderate nor an extremist.[62]

After 1908 he became engrossed more and more in local politics, being elected corporation representative to the Calcutta Improvement Trust in 1912. Though a member for a while of the Bengal Legislative Council in the twenties, he never regained his political importance of the swadeshi days. But Aswinicoomar rightly considered as the really memorable part of his public life his role during 1905-8 as "the pioneer of organised labour movement in India".[63] The autobiographical fragment left by him tells us little about his political activity, but describes in considerable detail his work among Budge Budge jute workers, Asansol railmen and Calcutta printers and dock labourers.

Closely associated with Aswinicoomar in the work of organising an Indian mill-hands' union among the jute employees was his younger contemporary and fellow-barrister Prabhatkusum Roychaudhuri (1878-1921), son of Debiprasanna, the well-known Brahmo editor of *Nabya-Bharat*. Prabhatkusum was one of the organisers of the Calcutta Congress Industrial Exhibition of 1906; as this was virtually boycotted by the extremists, his work as its assistant secretary emphasised his moderate affinities. Newspaper tributes published after his death mention Prabhatkusum's connections with the Burn and press strikes of the swadeshi era.[64] At the 24-Parganas district conference of January 1910 he moved a resolution demanding the abolition of night work in jute mills.[65] Unlike Aswinicoomar, he retained an interest in labour matters throughout his tragically brief life. Thus he presided over a Budge Budge jute workers' meeting in January 1921;[66] as

[62] *Nayak*, 11 Agrahayan 1316 (1909).
[63] Unpublished autobiographical fragment.
[64] *Pitri-smriti* (Tributes to Prabhatkusum published after his death by his son Prasun in 1921), pp. 40, 43.
[65] Leaflet containing the resolutions of the 24-Parganas district conference of January 1910, found among the private papers of Surjyakumar Ghoshal.
[66] *Servant*, 5 January 1921.

president of a Taxi Cab Union conducted a successful strike in 1920; and on the eve of his death was planning to re-arrange his house so as to provide space for meetings of taxi-drivers and mill-hands.[67]

Another labour leader with Brahmo connections was Premtosh Bose, proprietor of a small press (the Acme) in North Calcutta. Unlike Banerji and Roychaudhuri, Premtosh's political affiliations were definitely extremist, and as such he was the only one in this group who acquired the honour of a prominent place in the home department files. His name in fact comes forty-first in a list of fifty-three persons whom the Bengal government wanted to deport in February 1910. His dossier tells us that Premtosh "came into great promin-ence as an orator in the early days of the antipartition and swadeshi agitation, and struck out on a line of his own as a leader of industrial strikes. He was one of the chief en-gineers of the strikes in the government printing presses and the strike at Messrs Burn and Co and in all the strikes on the EIR as well as the Calcutta dock strike in 1907" (the correct date is March 1908). A member of the Anti-Cir-cular Society, Bose is described as "a person who interests himself very much in the more active work of the revolu-tionary party". Apart from a suspected connection with the Nangla dacoity, the Hindustan Central Cooperative Bureau and the Hindustan Cooperative Insurance (with both of which Premtosh was closely associated) were alleged to be "business establishments of the revolutionary movement".[68] Bose's last years were spent in England, where he died in unhappy circumstances.[69]

One would have liked to know much more about Athanasius Apurbakumar Ghosh—barrister, labour leader, virtually the lone Christian among top swadeshi figures, and, we are

[67] As his wife tells us in a moving tribute published in *Pitri-smriti*, p. 3.
[68] Proposed Deportation under Bengal Regulation III of 1818 of 53 persons—Home Political Progs A, March 1910, n. 33-40. The report on Premtosh Bose (Progs 36) also charges him—on what basis we do not know—with misappropriation of union and insurance funds.
[69] Hemendraprasad Ghosh, *Congress* (1920), p. 167.

told, a firm believer in socialism. Both Jadugopal Mukhopadhyay and Bhupendranath Dutta mention lectures on socialism by Apurbakumar to Anushilan recruits in the early days of the samiti.[70] While studying law in England Ghosh had spoken on socialism "from a hundred platform(s)", says Bhupendranath, quoting Aswinicoomar Banerji.[71] He was one of the leading figures in the East Indian Railway strike of 1906, and according to government reports had come to be known as the 'printers' king' through his role in organising the pressmen.[72] A. C. Banerji refers to him as one of the twelve leading extremists of Bengal in a letter to the *Bengalee* proposing reconciliation soon after the Surat split.[73] His political ideas seem interesting, from the little we can know about them through Bhupendranath Dutta. Though a personal friend of P. Mitter, Apurbakumar never became a member of the Anushilan, and strongly opposed individual terrorism. He believed rather in mass civil disobedience.[74]

III. Strikes and Unions in Bengal, 1905-8

On 2 September 1905, the College Square meeting to condemn the Partition Proclamation issued on the previous

[70] Jadugopal Mukhopadhyay, *Biplabi jibaner smriti* (1956), p. 271. Dr Bhupendranath Dutta, *Bharater dwitiya swadhinata sangram* (1949), pp. 33, 147.

[71] Bhupendranath Dutta, *Ibid*. It is noteworthy that both A. C. Banerji and A. K. Ghosh were students in England during the late 1880s—the years which saw the revival of a militant labour and socialist movement there after forty years of mid-Victorian slumber.

[72] Report on the Anti-Partition and Swadeshi Movement in Bengal, paras 3-7 (D.O.133P.D., from Government of Bengal to Government of India Home Department, 10 September 1906)—Home Public Progs B, October 1906, n. 13. A. K. Ghosh is referred to again as the 'printers' king' in Abstract of Reports from Bengal during the second half of February 1907, para 1—Home Public Progs A, April 1907, n. 207-210.

[73] "The Congress Split—A Suggestion", *Bengalee*, 18 January 1908. A. C. Banerji proposed a joint working committee consisting of 12 from each of the two parties to reestablish Congress unity in Bengal. Among the 12 moderates he included Prabhatkusum Roychaudhuri.

[74] Bhupendranath Dutta, *op. cit.*, pp. 147-48.

day receivd the news of a strike by some three hundred clerks of the Burn Iron Works in Howrah "with such enthusiasm and admiration as to defy all attempts at description".[75] The immediate occasion for the walk-out by 247 Burn clerks[76] was rather trivial—a new mechanical system of recording attendance which the babus felt was derogatory to their honour[77]—but nationalist public opinion unanimously hailed this protest by the proverbially timid Bengali clerk as symbolic of a new age. A campaign to raise funds for the strikers was immediately launched. J. N. Roy offered Rs 100 at the College Square meeting; boarders of the Metropolitan College Hostel expressed sympathy for the clerks;[78] Duff College schoolboys sacrificed their puja theatricals;[79] and within a month the *Bengalee* and the *Sanjibani* had raised Rs 3,710 and Rs 1,431 respectively.[80] Money came even from Midnapur,[81] and a munsiff in far-off Vikrampur recorded in his private diary that the Burn clerks "are regarded as popular heroes, and their example is being held up to other oppressed and insulted ministerial officers as most worthy of imitation; their conduct has already ensured a more respectable treatment in the case of clerks of other government and commercial concerns".[82] "If the three hundred heroes of Burn Company die of hunger, it would show that we deserve nothing better than kicks and blows"—stated a *Prabasi* contributor.[83]

[75] *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 4 September 1905.
[76] *Sanjibani*, 22 Bhadra 1312 (6 September 1905), gives the exact figure.
[77] *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 9 September 1905. Cf. also the account given in the Howrah monthly *Alochana*, Aswin 1312. But there was also a background of long-continued ill-treatment of babus by the white management, as a clerk pointed out in a letter published in *Bengalee*, 10 September 1905.
[78] *Bengalee*, 5 September 1905.
[79] Jadugopal Mukhopadhyay: *Biplabi jibaner smriti* (1956), pp. 252-53.
[80] *Bengalee*, 4 October 1905.
[81] *Ibid*, 15 September 1905.
[82] Unpublished Diary of Gyanchandra Banerji, entry of 4 October 1905.
[83] Pramathanath Raychaudhuri, "katha banam kaj", *Prabasi*, Aswin 1312

Indian hardware merchants started a boycott of Burn.[84] When the management started employing new men, Tincowry Goswami (a clerk of Thacker Spink's) got arrested on a charge of assaulting a strike-breaker. He was defended successfully by A. C. Banerji and A. K. Ghosh[85]—their first recorded intervention in labour disputes. Police reports name A. C. Banerji as the most prominent of the swadeshi leaders who "tried to make capital out of" the Burn strike.[86] There was some talk of starting a Clerks' Defence Association headed by the bara babus of European firms to resist ill-treatment by white bosses.[87] When letters appeared in the *Englishman* threatening retrenchment or pay reductions of Bengali clerks as an answer to the boycott, the *Sandhya* suggested a mass resignation from British firms. "We cordially summon all clerks of European mercantile offices to the office of the *Sandhya*. Some definite consultation must be held over this question."[88] But nothing concrete seems to have been achieved, and the Burn strike itself failed. The management dismissed all the strikers and employed new clerks.[89] After

(November 1905). That the passage occurs in an article defending the old style of agitation against Rabindranath's charge of mendicancy is an indication of the wide support enjoyed by the strikers.

[84] *Sanjibani*, 29 Bhadra 1312 (13 September 1905). *Bengalee*, 12 September 1905.

[85] *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 22 September 1905. *Indian Mirror*, 22 September 1905.

[86] Note by C. Stevenson-Moore, 2 December 1905—Home Public Progs A, June 1906, n. 172.

[87] The suggestion was first made by the *Daily Hitavadi*, 17 September 1905 (RNP(B) for week ending 23 September 1905), repeated by it on 26 September (RNP(B) for week ending 30 September 1905), and echoed in the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* of 3 October and *Bengalee* of 5 October 1905, which attributed the idea to the secretary of the Chaitanya Library (Gourhari Sen).

[88] *Sandhya*, 6 September 1905 (RNP(B) for week ending 9 September 1905).

[89] Report on the Agitation against the Partition of Bengal—from the Government of Bengal to Government of India Home Department. No. 205P, 25 January 1906, para 61. Home Public Progs A, June 1906, n. 175.

the first week of October 1905 the nationalist newspapers quietly dropped the subject. No union had been set up at Burn, and the entire movement at this big engineering concern (with nearly 4,000 workers according to the *Howrah District Gazetteer*) had remained confined to white-collar Bengali Hindu babus who had been perhaps a bit too keen to emphasise their superiority over the mass of coolies.

The Burn strike proved to be just the first in a long series, and the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* of 6 October 1905 made the interesting comment that "It seems that this is the season of strikes." Apart from the unrest at the Government Press establishments starting from the last week of September (see below), there was a short but successful strike by the Anglo-Indian East Indian Railway guards on the question of overtime allowances on 3 October,[90] followed two days later by a Calcutta tram conductors' walk-out. Services in five sections were affected, and the strikers held a meeting at Wellington Square.[91] The strike had been preceded by a petition demanding consolidated monthly wages in place of payment by trips, an end to unjust fines, permission to sit down when not actually attending passengers, a reduction in working hours (from the fantastic 4.30 a.m. to 12 p.m. with a 3-hour gap), and better uniforms.[92] A. C. Banerji and A.K. Ghosh again came forward to defend two conductors (Golam Subdar and Akshaykumar Banerji) accused of assaulting a loyal employee.[93] On 10 October, following mediation efforts by A. C. Banerji who had talks with Wells, the managing director,[94] the men resumed work on the assurance of an early consideration of their grievances. But the management later went back on their word and summarily rejected most of the demands of the conductors, who were asked

[90] *Bengalee*, 11 October 1905.
[91] *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 6 October 1905.
[92] *Ibid.* Also *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 21 October 1905. *Bangalee* 25 October 1905.
[93] *Englishman*, 10 October 1905; *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 12 October 1905.
[94] *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 12 October 1906.

to quit if the existing terms did not suit them.[95] A case against nine conductors dragged on till April 1906 when they were given 3 months' rigorous imprisonment,[96] and quite a number seem to have been dismissed. The swadeshi concern Indian Stores employed one of them, as a letter to A. C. Banerji dated 15 January 1906 mentions. The Anti-Circular Society raised funds for the victimised employees; Ramakanta Roy, one of its leaders, had been active in connection with the Burn strike, too.[97]

The national upsurge on 16 October 1905 did not leave the workers unaffected. Newspaper accounts and police reports of the day convey almost the atmosphere of a modern bandh. The Calcutta police commissioner reported an "almost universal" closing of shops in the native quarters, students squatting on tram lines in North Calcutta, a strike by coolies at the Ralli Brothers jute works in Chitpur, and an abortive attempt to 'tamper' with Kidderpore coal depot coolies.[98] Most offices had to close down after 2 p.m., as the employees were keeping the arandhan pledge.[99] 11,000 carters were off the streets,, and "there was not a single cart or a coolie near any of the four goods termini of the Eastern Bengal State Railway". "Twelve jute press factories, one sugar factory, one shellac factory, one gun factory, and about seventy local mills were closed", states the *Amrita Bazar Patrika*.[100] Some exaggeration may be suspected here (there

[95] *Ibid*, 3 November 1905. The managing agent declared for instance that "I cannot permit conductors to actually sit down while on duty"—no special seats could be provided for them; though he magnanimously allowed them to lean against the back of the car.

[96] *Bengalee*, 19 April 1906.

[97] *Bengalee*, 9 November 1906 (Annual Report of the Anti-Circular Society). *Ibid*, 12 Mav 1906 (memorial meeting for Ramakanta Roy).

[98] Report on the Agitation Against the Partition of Bengal (from Bengal Government No. 205 P, 25 January 1906) para 57—Home Public Progs A, June 1906, n. 175.

[99] *Sanjibani*, 19 October 1905.

[100] *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 17 October 1905—"Calcutta in Ferment" (editorial), A. C. Banerji is said to have persuaded the Hindustani cart-owners to stay away from the streets—Krishnakumar Mitra, *Atmacharit*, p. 254.

were after all only thirty-five jute mills all told in Bengal in 1905), and no doubt in many cases the initiative came from the managers.[101] But we do read of workers forcing their officers to close down—at the Sibpur Jute Mill, where they brushed aside the opposition of the assistant manager;[102] at the Burn Company shipyard in Howrah, where 1,200 struck work on being refused leave to attend the Federation Hall meeting;[103] and at the East Indian Railway workshop at Lilooah, where the threat of a strike obtained a holiday on the 16th.[104] At the Fort Gloster Jute Mill at Bauria,[105] the European manager sparked off what proved to be a series of strikes by his objection to the Bengali clerks and Muslim mill-hands exchanging rakhis.[106] Even the police constables of Calcutta were restive, and a pay increase was hurriedly sanctioned by the police commissioner on 1 November—"the agitators had been attempting to tamper with the men and urging them to strike".[107]

In the succeeding months there occurred a number of smaller strikes, unconnected with the swadeshi movement but still evoking some nationalist interest and sympathy. Clerks at Lipton's godown struck in protest against the behaviour of an European overseer (2 November 1905).[108] Two hundred lower grade employees of the general post office staged a shortlived strike when their petition for higher pay was rejected (9 November 1905).[109] Barisal settlement office clerks went on strike in the last week of November against an executive order extending their hours of work; the strike lasted for six weeks, but in the end 63 were dismissed—according to the *Weekly Chronicle* those with swadeshi

[101] As the *Bengalee* (18 October 1905) mentions.
[102] *Sanjibani*, 19 October 1905; *Bengalee*, 17 October 1905.
[103] *Bengalee*, 18 October 1905; *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 20 October 1905.
[104] *Bengalee*, 19 October 1905.
[105] *Ibid*, 18 October 1905.
[106] *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 17 October 1905.
[107] Home Public Progs A, June 1906, n. 175, p. 74.
[108] *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 4 November 1905.
[109] *Ibid*, 11 November 1905.

affiliations were picked out for victimisation.[110] The *New India* of Bepinchandra Pal on this occasion suggested the adoption of what it called "Russian methods" of selfdefence —"If two or three thousand clerks simultaneously struck work by way of protest against the dismissal of sixty-three of their brethren, it would bring even the Fuller government to its knees."[111]

As prices rose, spontaneous (and usually shortlived) strikes on purely economic issues became frequent. On 4 May 1906, the *Bengalee* editorially supported the demand of government clerks and others for "grain compensation allowances"—"roughly speaking, living in Calcutta has grown dearer by at least fifteen per cent during the past few months", it declared. Two thousand Oriya coolies employed by import houses struck work in the last week of April demanding a rise in their pay-rate from 3 as to 4 as per package.[112] There was a successful strike by Calcutta Corporation sweepers in August 1906, winning them a grain compensation allowance of Rs 1-8 as a month.[113] The Bengal government granted such allowance on a temporary basis to its clerks on the pay-scale Rs 16 to Rs 30 in October 1906;[114] the Eastern Bengal and Assam administration conceded the same demand more than a year later.[115] A few private firms—like Gillanders-Arbuthnot—followed suit.[116] Sweepers of Garden Reach Municipality staged two strikes (December 1906, January 1907) demanding such allowance at the government rate.[117] Howrah

[110] *Bengalee* and *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 9 January 1906. *Weekly Chronicle*, 3 January 1906 (RNEP(B) for week ending 13 January 1906).
[111] *New India*, 13 January 1906 (RNEP(B) for week ending 20 January 1906).
[112] *Bengalee*, 27 April 1906.
[113] *Ibid*, 22 August 1906; *Pioneer* (Allahabad), 26 August 1906.
[114] *Bengalee*, 20 October 1906.
[115] *Ibid*, 15 January 1908.
[116] *Ibid*, 1 November 1906.
[117] *Ibid*, 25 December 1906, 25 January 1907.

sweepers and carters successfully defended their Re 1 grain-allowance through strike action.[118]

Diligent study of contemporary newspapers would no doubt bring to light many more instances of such spontaneous outbursts. But much more significant in the ultimate analysis were the strikes with some organisation and political backing. These took place mainly in three sectors—among press employees, railwaymen and jute mill-hands. In each case attempts were made to set up trade unions of a sort.

Press Employees—the Printers' Union

Relatively small in number, the press employees of Calcutta still won a unique position through their militancy and political awareness, and to them probably belongs the honour of having organised the first real trade union in Bengal. Their profession demanded a certain minimum of literacy, while the employment of many in presses owned by newspapers[119] brought them into close touch with nationalist opinions and leaders. The latter on their part showed greater awareness of the grievances of the printers than of any other section of the labouring community.

Complaints regarding harsh service conditions and ill-treatment by white officers in the two big government presses in Calcutta (the Government of India and the Bengal Secretariat with 1,450 and 637 employees respectively in 1905)[120] had been focused in Indian newspapers on several occasions even prior to swadeshi times.[121] The major dispute

[118] *Ibid*, 19 February 1907.

[119] 9 out of the 26 private presses employing more than 50 in Calcutta belonged to newspapers. Statement of Industrial Labour (1901-05)—Government of Bengal, General Miscellaneous Progs B, September 1907, n. 68-69.

[120] *Ibid.*

[121] Thus the *Hitavadi* of 1 January 1904 denounced Sunday work and the alleged extortion of Rs 13.000 in fines in a single year at the Government of India Press (RNP (B) for week ending 9 January 1904). The *Sri-Sri-Vishnupriya o Anandabazar Patrika* complained of excessive hours and ill-treatment by the new superintendent of the same establishment on 27 July 1904 (RNP(B) for week ending 6 August 1904).

at the two presses between September and November 1905 also sprang basically from grievances like inadequate pay, fines, excessive hours, arbitrary demotions and the generally tactless behaviour of superintendents, Ross and Chalmers.[122] According to a later government report, "the Press strikes do not appear to have been originally due to the agitation, but the agitators availed themselves of the strikes as soon as they occurred to stir up discontent and embitter the relations between the English employer and the Indian employee as much as possible".[123] The prejorative phrases may be ignored, but it remains significant that the government compositors in September 1905 seem to have sought the help of the political leaders right from the beginning.

A petition sent by the employees of the Government of India Press in February 1905 had been ignored by the authorities. New salary rules which led to a reduction in the puja advance provided the immediate occasion for the strike. On 23 September the men invited three barristers, A. C. Banerji, A. K. Ghosh and B. M. Chatterji, to attend their meeting at the maidan. A committee of twelve (including Hindus, Muslims and Indian Christians) was elected for consultations with Banerji, who advised them to petition their authorities again, at the same time suggesting a defence fund to prepare future action.[124] Despite this advice, the employees went on strike on 27 September, and were joined by their comrades

[122] The grievances of the government compositors were described in considerable detail in the *Sandhya* of 23 October and 1 November 1905 (RNP(B) for weeks ending 28 October and 4 November 1905), and in the *Bengalee* and *Amrita Bazar Patrika* of 28 October 1905. A *Bengalee* leader of 12 November repeated the charge of Rs 13,000 being taken annually as fines, stated that the employees at the Government of India Press were made to work 78 hours a week during the Calcutta season, and alleged that work on Sundays was often enforced without providing for an alternative leave-day (a clear violation of the Factory Act).

[123] First Fortnightly Report on progress of agitation against partition and of the swadeshi movement from Government of Bengal, FAR No. 1, 17 September 1906, para 10. Home Public Progs B, October 1906, n. 13.

[124] *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 25 September 1905.

of the Bengal Secretariat Press protesting against the high-handedness of superintendent Chalmers.[125] A frantic message from the commerce and industry department suggested the distribution of the Calcutta printing work among the Allahabad, Madras, Lahore, Bombay and Simla government presses. Publication of the *Calcutta Gazette* was delayed by 48 hours.[126] The *Amrita Bazar Patrika* suggested on 27 September the formation of a "defence society" for "clerks, compositors and people of that class...they indeed do not yet fully know what a power they are in the land". This first strike proved shortlived, however, and there was a lull during the pujas with the men awaiting the result of their petition of 2 October to the comptroller-general.

The second and much more intensive round of struggle started in the third week of October with the sudden dismissal (while most of the men were away for the pujas) of seven leaders of the agitation in the Government of India Press, together with an order on 21 October rejecting summarily all joint petitions as improper. Thirty-four employees of the Bengal Secretariat Press also faced dismissal.[127] On 23 October a telegram from Calcutta to Simla informed "Press entirely closed today owing to strike" and stated that the *Gazette* would have to be printed entirely in Simla.[128] A dogged struggle developed, with the authorities allegedly trying to recruit blacklegs from as far afield as Lucknow,[129] and trying to get urgent matter printed by convicts in Presi-

[125] *Ibid*, 28 September 1905. A compositor at the latter establishment sued Chalmers for allegedly abusing him on 23 September for refusing to work Government of India Press matter, B. M. Chatterji appeared for the plaintiff. Chief presidency magistrate Kingsford dismissed the case as trivial (*Bengalee*, 27 October 1907).

[126] Telephone message from the commerce and industry department to the home department, Government of India, 27 September 1905. Home Public Progs B, October 1905, n. 275-83.

[127] *Bengalee* and *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 28 October 1905, reporting a speech by A. K. Ghosh which gave a detailed account of the dispute.

[128] Home Public Progs B, October 1905, n. 275-283

[129] *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 7 November 1905.

dency Jail.[130] Prabhatkusum Roychaudhuri defended four pressmen accused of assaulting a strikebreaker.[131] Meanwhile, at a College Square meeting on 21 October, a Printers' and Compositor's League was formed on the advice of Apurbakumar Ghosh.[132] A. K. Ghosh and Brahmabandhab Upadhyay were declared to be the honorary secretaries of this union at a joint meeting of the employees held in Sibnarayan Das Lane in North Calcutta on 27 October.[133] A. K. Ghosh related the history of the dispute at this meeting; grievances of individual employees were recorded at succeeding sessions of the union held at the same place on 30 October and 1 and 3 November. Those present included, besides Ghosh and Upadhyay, A. C. Banerji and Shyamsundar Chakrabarti.[134] The office of Brahmabandhab's evening daily *Sandhya* (in nearby Cornwallis Street) became a great meeting place of the strikers.[135] The connection with the political movement was reflected in a notice at the Bengal Secretariat Press which announced a workers' meeting, called for boycott of foreign articles, and named as the penalty for noncompliance the sin of Brahmin-slaughter.[136]

As the strike dragged on, A. C. Banerji led a fund-raising procession of press employees through the streets of Calcutta. This is how he describes the event—"The procession of the Printers' Union covered a large area from Cornwallis Street to the Paikpara Rajbati. Even constables and women of the town came forward with their contributions. It is noteworthy

130 *Ibid*, 27 October 1905.

131 *Bengalee*, 18 November 1905. The four accused were Kalipada Das, Sanatan Uriya, Narsingh Das, Shambhu Uriya—interesting evidence of the strike transcending community barriers. Three of them were convicted (*Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 25 November 1905).

132 *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 24 October 1905.

133 *Ibid*, 28 October 1905.

134 *Bengalee*, 31 October, 2 November; *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 4 November 1905.

135 Probodhchandra Sinha, *Upadhyay Brahmobandhab* (no date), pp. 93-94.

136 *Administration of Bengal under Andrew Fraser, 1903-1908*. Section entitled "Industrial Unrest".

that Kumar Manmathanath Mitra entertained the processionists, nearly 4 to 5 hundred strong, with a good feed and paid Rs 150 in cash as his contribution. At the house of Baboo Pasupati Bose of Bagbazar, the processionists were similarly entertained and paid Rs 100 in cash. When they reached the Paikpara Rajbati late in the afternoon, they received a most cordial welcome. There they were fed right royally and paid Rs 100; over and above an additional sum of Rs 100 was paid as the price of foodstuff such as rice, potatoes and green vegetables which the processionists had collected during their day-long march."[137]

A. C. Banerji's activities led to his being shadowed by "a stalwart European inspector on a bike".[138] The *Sandhya* in its own unique language hailed him for making the cause of the poor compositors and tram conductors his own.[139] It also held up the strike as an example before the students—"The coolies and working men, the clerks on petty emoluments, even the compositors of the printing presses are sticking to their resolve, regardless of the sufferings of their wives and children. With what face therefore are you going to accept with bowed heads this insulting Carlyle Circular?"[140]

Eventually the authorities had to climb down to a certain extent. J. P. Hewett, the head of the commerce and industry department, came down from Simla to inquire into the grievances of the Government of India pressmen. He had

[137] Unpublished autobiographical fragment—*Private Papers of Aswinicoomar Banerji.*

[138] *Amrita Bazar Patrika,* 23 November 1905, quoting the *Indian Daily News.*

[139] *Sandhya,* 8 Agrahayan 1312 (November 1905), preserved in *Private Papers of Aswinicoomar Banerji.* Two years later, the *Nabasakti* while condemning A. C. Banerji's apology in the sedition case recalled the printers' procession as his finest hour—"It was this Aswini who one day went like a beggar from door to door asking for help for the printers who had gone on strike. But we knew that his nature had become polluted with bilati ideas when he accepted a commissionership in the Calcutta Corporation." *Nabasakti,* 12 November 1907 (RNP(B) for week ending 16 November 1907).

[140] *Sandhya,* 8 November 1905 (RNP(B) for week ending 18 November 1905).

talks with six representatives of the employees (though he refused to meet A. K. Ghosh) on 10 November, and offered some concessions—like leave in lieu of Sunday work—which eventually ended the strike.[141] Lieutenant-governor Fraser intervened personally in the Bengal Secretariat Press dispute, and managed to persuade the men to resume work on the promise of an inquiry.[142] The victory was by no means complete—in particular, dismissal orders against seven in the Government of India Press were not withdrawn,[143] and discontent continued especially at the Bengal Secretariat Press leading to a new 45-point memorial in March 1906.[144] But there can be little doubt that the nationalist intervention had saved the employees from total defeat—or, as an official report put in a roundabout manner, the strike had been "unduly prolonged" by A. K. Ghosh and A. C. Banerji.[145] Above all, the Printers' Union survived, and soon began to extend its work to the private presses of the city.

A branch unit of the Printers' Union seems to have been set up at the Statesman Press in the last week of November, since the first anniversary of this organisation was celebrated on 25 November 1906.[146] The activities of the union reached their highest point during the summer of 1906. A special branch report dated 7 September 1906 notes "quite an epidemic of strikes among the printing presses in Calcutta", affecting, though only for a short while, "no less than six private presses and the Bengal Secretariat Press". "They were brought to a close by the intervention in several cases, of the 'printers' king'—A. K. Ghose."[147] A more detailed picture

[141] *Bengalee*, 11 November, 15 November 1905.
[142] *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 23 November 1905.
[143] *Bengalee*, 16 November 1905.
[144] *Daily Hitavadi*, 23-24 March 1906 (RNP (B) for week ending 31 March 1906).
[145] Report on the Agitation against the Partition of Bengal, 25 January 1906, para 61. Home Public Progs A, June 1906, n. 175.
[146] *Bengalee*, 27 November 1906.
[147] Report on the Agitation and Swadeshi Movement in Bengal, drawn up by the special branch of office of inspector-general of police dated 7 September 1906, and sent by the Government of Bengal to the Govern-

emerges from the newspaper files, with the *Bengalee* reporting as many as five meetings of the Printers' Union in the course of the single month of June 1906. The union conducted a successful twelve-day strike at the Thacker Spink Press, winning the removal of an unpopular officer, changes in attendance and leave rules, and full pay for the strike-period.[148] The news of this major victory (on 12 June) was greeted with a procession of printers shouting Bande Mataram down Cornwallis and College Street.[149] On 16 June there was a big victory celebration at City College with Krishnakumar Mitra presiding, attended by 5,000 "Muslims, Hindus, Eurasians, Madrasis". On behalf of the Thacker Spink employees, a Eurasian presented an address to union founder and president A. K. Ghosh (who was described as a "raja" for his services for printers), treasurer Charuchandra Mitra and secretary Premtosh Bose. We also hear of an assistant secretary named Narsingh Chandra who was probably an employee himself. The meeting ended amidst slogans of Bande Mataram and Allah-ho-Akbar.[150]

At the next union meeting (23 June) A. K. Ghosh stated that nearly all the big presses of Calcutta had joined the organisation, including the Eastern Bengal State Railway, Edinburgh, Clive, Baptist Mission, Methodist and Bengal Printing presses; subscription rates were stated to be half-anna and one anna monthly. A. C. Banerji claimed a membership of 20,000. There was some talk of starting an all-India organisation, and Premtosh Bose mentioned letters from Bombay and Madras pressmen asking for information about union rules. Charuchandra Mitra suggested a fund to help printers in distress in famine-stricken Barisal and Faridpur.[151] A meeting at Albert Hall on 30 June heard speeches by Liakat Husain (in Urdu), Srish Chandra (a pleader), Bejoy

ment of India (home department) No. 133 P.D., 10 September 1906, para 7—Home Public Progs B, October 1906, n. 13.

[148] *Bengalee*, 13 June, 24 June 1906, reporting union meetings at 12 Sibnarayan Das Lane on 12 and 23 June.

[149] *Ibid*, 13 June 1906.

[150] *Ibid*, 17 June 1906.

[151] *Ibid*, 24 June 1906.

Chatterji, Rajat Ray and Suren Haldar as well as assistant secretary Narsingh Chandra. It was stated that many owners were coming to recognise the union—the Herdellen after a strike, Caledonian, Methodist (where the hours had been reduced from 8.30 a.m.-5 p.m. to 10 a.m.-5 p.m.)—and the meeting decided to continue the strike at the Eastern Bengal State Railway Press till the union was accepted as the bargaining authority.[152]

The Printers' Union set an example of working-class solidarity by sending a message of sympathy from their 23 June meeting to the Indian staff of the East Indian Railway loop line who had gone on strike.[153] There were also two striking manifestations at this time of the close link between the union and the national movement. The Maharashtrian leaders Tilak, Khaparde and Munje (present in Calcutta for the Shivaji Utsava) were given a reception at the union headquarters (12 Sibnarayan Das Lane) on 6 June 1906. Tilak stated that he was himself a printer, mentioned the attempts to start a similar union at Bombay, and suggested the use of traditional caste discipline in organising trade guilds and unions—not perhaps a particularly bright or tactful speech, since many among his audience of 3,000 employees must have been Muslims or Eurasians.[154] Two months later, both newspaper accounts and police reports make special mention of the Printers' Union men joining in large numbers the 7 August procession to College Square which otherwise consisted mainly of students.[155]

The Statesman Press unit seems to have been one of the more active of the constituents of the Printers' Union. The private papers of A. C. Banerji include a letter dated 11 July 1906 from Peary Mohun Chatterji asking him to preside over a coming meeting of the Statesman Press Union. On

[152] *Ibid*, 1 July 1906.
[153] *Ibid*, 27 June 1906.
[154] *Ibid*, 9 June 1906.
[155] *Ibid*, 8 August 1906. Bengal Police Abstract No. 32, 11 August 1906 forming Enclosure A of Abstract of Reports regarding agitation during the first half of August (13 September 1906)—Home Public Progs B, October 1906, n. 13.

25 November 1906, the first anniversary of this unit was observed in grand style by a garden party in Tiljolah. Speeches were made "urging the use of swadeshi articles and thanking the proprietors of the Statesman office for giving increases to the salaries of the men employed there". "Hearty cheers" were given for the union president A. K. Ghosh, and then the men "sat down to a sumptuous tiffin, Hindus, Mohamedans and native Christians sitting together on the floor of the garden house"—itself a considerable social achievement.[156] Continuing nationalist interest in the affairs of the pressmen is indicated by a letter dated 2 November 1906 from Premtosh Bose to A. C. Banerji requesting him to take up the defence of a Printers' Union case, as both Bejoy Chatterji and A. K. Ghosh were ill.

In February 1907, a police report mentions two meetings of the Printers' Union "which had been quiescent for some months". A. K. Ghosh presided as usual, the affairs of the Government of India Press were discussed, and the meetings were "followed by a strike in a large private press"[157] —the Edinburgh. The strike lasted for about a month, but eventually failed[158] with more than two hundred of the employees losing their jobs.[159] We hear of the Printers' Union again in October 1907, trying to raise funds for the family of the imprisoned *Yugantar* printer, Basantakumar Bhattacharya.[160] But references to the union had become scarce, a *Sandhya* report on January 1908 cryptically indicated internal troubles,[161] and probably the organisation shared in the general decline of mass associations which had set in at about this time. Memory of this most success-

[156] *Bengalee*, 27 November 1906.
[157] Abstract of Reports during the second half of February 1907 (3 April 1907), para 1—Home Public Progs A, April 1907, n. 207-210.
[158] Fortnightly Report from Bengal, No. FAR 10, 25 March 1907, para 3. Home Public Progs A, April 1907, n. 209.
[159] *Bengalee*, 15 March 1907.
[160] *Sanjibani*, 3 October 1907 (RNP(B) for week ending 12 October 1907).
[161] *Sandhya*, 25 January 1908 (RNP (B) for week ending 1 February 1908).

ful of the swadeshi trade unions was not entirely lost, however. In an election appeal in 1936, the well-known trade union leader Mrinalkanti Bose recalled his work in reviving the Printers' Union together with Chittaranjan Das in 1919; he had the historical sense also to trace the origins of this organisation to 1905.[162]

Railway Strikes

The swadeshi period witnessed a series of strikes among railwaymen—the biggest single section of the Indian working class, numbering about 450,000 in 1905.[163] Those involved at one time or another included the labour aristocracy of predominantly Anglo-Indian guards and drivers, white-collar employees belonging to the fringes of bhadralok society, and the proletariat of railway workshops. Perhaps inevitably, the social and often racial differences between these three sections usually prevented united action. It is also understandable that the movement which evoked the most sustained nationalist interest and support was that of the Bengali Hindu station-masters and clerks of the East India Railway between July and September 1906. Nationalist involvement in labour affairs in fact reached a point of climax with this memorable two-month-long strike.

Like other fixed-income groups, the Indian employees of the EIR were hit hard by the sudden rise in prices; they were also the victims of gross racial discrimination. Thus the maximum salary of an Indian station-master was Rs 45 a month, while the scale for Eurasians in the identical job was Rs 50-200.[164] When the clerical staff of the Delhi sec-

[162] Election appeal, included in *Private Papers of Surjyakumar Ghoshal.*

[163] In 1905 the workers of railway open lines numbered 372,951. In addition, 79,082 were employed in workshops attached to the railways. Bengal had three such workshops—at Lilooah, Kharagpur and Jamalpur (in present-day Bihar), employing about 5,000, 3,600 and 8,200 men respectively. Statement of Industrial Labour for 1901-05—Government of Bengal General Miscllaneous Progs B, September 1907, n. 68-69.

[164] Editorial comment in *Bengalee*, 3 July 1906.

tion went on strike for a short time in the last week of July 1906, one of their principal grievances was the use of the term "native" to designate them. They wanted "that they should be called Indians"[165]—interesting evidence of the new spirit of national selfrespect. Matters was aggravated by the behaviour of Dring, traffic manager of the privately-owned EIR, who seems to have got himself disliked by all sections of employees, Anglo-Indians not excepted.

In Bengal, lightning strikes by white-collar employees of the Sahibgunj loop and Asansol sections on 25 and 29 June 1906 obtained some leave and allowance benefits for the clerical staff of higher grades.[166] But the really serious development was the strike which began on the Howrah-Bandel section on 23 July following the breakdown of talks with a 17-member employees' delegation and the summary dismissal of the Konnagar representative, station-master Surendranath Mukherji, for having dared to raise the question of racial discrimination at the meeting.[167] Mukherji became one of the leaders of the strike, together with the station-master of Hooghly, Nrityagopal Bhattacharya. The strike was virtually complete among the Bengali station-masters and clerks of the Howrah-Bandel section, and it gradually spread up the main line. But the Eurasian drivers and guards were hostile, and the coolies as yet indifferent—and so passenger traffic continued though with much inconvenience, and even goods transport was not entirely disrupted.[168] The management too could afford to take a stiff stand, and it started dismissing hundreds of employees (270 by the middle of August, according to the *Pioneer* of 13 August 1906). Meanwhile nationalist lawyers and journalists had come forward to help the strikers.[169] "Everything must be done to make the strike

[165] *Pioneer*, 24 July 1906.
[166] *Bengalee*, 28 and 30 June, 1 and 6 July 1906.
[167] *Ibid*, 24 July 1906.
[168] *Ibid*, 25 and 26 July; *Pioneer*, 4 August 1906.
[169] A police report stated at this time—"The original strike does not seem to have been connected in any way with the antipartition movement, but some of the Calcutta lawyers and journalists who

successful", declared the *Sandhya* on 24 July, and advised the strikers to come to Calcutta for consultations with nationalist leaders.[170] The *Sandhya* office (193, Cornwallis Street) once again became a great meeting-place. A Railwaymen's Union was started on 27 July at a meeting held in this office, where Apurbakumar Ghosh garlanded Nrityagopal Bhattacharya and Surendranath Mukherji, and the speakers included Bepinchandra Pal and Shyamsundar Chakrabarti.[171] Two days later an open-air meeting was held at Pantir's Math —the favourite extremist meeting-place off Cornwallis Street —where Chittaranjan Das presided and a resolution supporting the strike was moved by Pal, Liakat Husain and J. N. Roy.[172]

As the management remained obdurate, refusing to take back the dismissed strikers, and the government declined to intervene, nationalist participation advanced a step further. A special branch report describes this development—"Failing in their varied attempts to coerce the company into granting the extravagant demands set up by them on behalf of the strikers, the Calcutta agitators, chiefly Premtosh Bose, A. K. Ghosh and Liakat Husain, have since August transferred the scene of their machinations to the railway centres of Asansol, Ranigunj, Jamalpur and Sahibgunj inciting the workmen there to join the Railway Union which they have started and which is to support all railway workers who go on strike. Week after week meetings have been held first at one centre, then at another, at which the railway employees have been besought in language both seductive and seditious to join their

take part in the partition agitation have espoused the cause of the strikers and have even done their best to bring about further strikes. It has not, however, been reported that any of the funds collected for the swadeshi movement have been devoted to the assistance of the strikers." Abstract of Reports regarding agitation during first half of August, Enclosure A (Bengal Police Abstract No. 32, 11 August 1906). Home Public Progs B, October 1906, n. 13.

170 RNP(B) for week ending 28 July 1906.

171 *Bengalee*, 28 July 1906.

172 *Ibid*, 31 July 1906.

brethren of the Howrah district and thus force the company into acceding to their demands. The opportunity has not been missed at these meetings to advance the swadeshi cause and excite the men to boycott English goods. Secret meetings have been held in Asansol and Calcutta, and insidious attempts made to get even the coolies to join the strikers. Travelling employees of the railway have used their opportunities to spread disaffection up and down the line, and suggestion was even thrown out that a social boycott should be employed to force the men to go on strike."[173] While political leaders usually classed with the extremists were more prominent, others were not inactive—thus Surendranath in a letter to A. C. Banerji dated 21 August 1906 declared: "We are doing our best in connection with the railway strike. I don't know how far we shall succeed." Ten days later we find him making arrangements for the fare of the Muslim agitator Abul Hossain up to Asansol.[174]

The strikers of the Howrah division were in dire straits. At "meetings held in camera in the office of the *Sandhya* newspaper" on 18 and 19 August it was admitted "that 400 of them were on the verge of starvation and needed help badly. But so unbounded is their confidence in the ability of Premtosh Bose and Surendranath Banerji to extricate them from their difficulties, that they are prepared to fight to the last, and if need be subsist upon the proceeds of the sale of their household effects."[175] The confidence was not entirely misplaced, as thanks mainly to the efforts of political leaders the movement and the Railwaymen's Union began to spread. An Asansol branch was set up on 4 August at a meeting addressed by Premtosh Bose, A. K. Ghosh (who "explained the utility of forming unions quoting the history of the formation of the Printers' Union") and Shyamsundar Chakrabarti.[176]

[173] Report on the Antipartition and Swadeshi Movement in Bengal (7 September 1906), para 3. Home Public Progs B, October 1906, n. 13.
[174] Two notes by Surendranath Banerji to A. C. Banerji, both dated 31 August (1906)—*Private Papers of Aswinicoomar Banerji.*
[175] Home Public Progs B, October 1906, n. 13, *op. cit.*, para 4.
[176] *Bengalee,* 7 August 1906. Shyamsundar Chakrabarti's role in the

A. K. Ghosh became its president, and Premtosh Bose secretary. Along with Liakat Husain, they addressed a series of meetings in Asansol in the second week of August, at one of which Ghosh condemned the policy of the government as hypocritical—"While refusing interference with the discretion of the company, the government was. . . assisting the company by sending armed police."[177] A memorial on behalf of 900 Asansol employees demanded reinstatement of their Howrah comrades, equal pay for Indian and white foremen, a 50 per cent rise in the wages of workshop hands, and grain compensation allowance.[178] Meanwhile Abul Hossain and Premtosh Bose had gone up the loop line to Sahibgunj (awakening the "slumbering little town"[179]) and Jamalpur, setting up union branches there. Their fiery speeches brought matters to a crisis at the big railway engineering centre of Jamalpur. On 27 August, the European overseers tried to prevent the workshop hands from attending a union meeting; this started off a riot by the predominantly non-Bengali coolies numbering nearly 10,000, and six labourers were injured by a shotgun fired by an Englishman. Next day the coolies refused to work, and the clerks (or babus) went along with them, it seems rather unwillingly—the *Bengalee* of 20 August stating that the latter had pleaded "that in the event of their not joining the coolies, their houses would be burnt and sacked and their families massacred by the infuriated coolies".[180] There fol-

Asansol rail strike is mentioned also in the file urging his deportation. Bengal Government to Government of India (Home), No. 427P of 9 December 1908. Home Political Progs A, February 1909, n. 137-199.

[177] *Bengalee*, 15 August 1906.

[178] *Ibid*, 28 August 1906.

[179] *Ibid*, 25 August 1906.

[180] Details of the Jamalpur incidents of 27-28 August 1906 are to be found in *Bengalee*, 30 August and *Sandhya*, 30 August (which too states that "the babus were told to return to their work, but for fear of the coolies they dared not do so"—(RNP(B) for week ending 8 September 1906). The official accounts are—Home Public Progs B, September 1906, n. 186-189 (Riots in Jamalpur); Home Public Progs B, February 1907, n. 65-67 (Jamalpur Riots); and Home Public Progs B, March 1907, n. 90 (Report on the strike at Jamalpur Workshops). The locomotive

lowed a week-long lock-out at the workshop, with the European manager of the Bonaoli raj estate trying to pressurise "such of the raja's tenants as are workmen to sign the apology"[181] which the authorities were insisting upon. But eventually the lock-out had to be lifted unconditionally on 6 September, and the coolies resumed work without however abandoning their demands for full payment for the period of closure, grain compensation allowance, and the removal of the unpopular time-keeper Macmillan.[182]

This massive and violent proletarian intervention, however, was more than many of the political leaders had really bargained for. A police report dated 25 September states that while urging the Jamalpur workers to join the union, "the leaders had no intention of causing a strike" and several of them endeavoured to persuade the men to return to work; though it still accuses "the Calcutta agitators" of wishing "to get control of all the railway employees, and, following Russian examples, to add 'general strikes' to their armoury".[183] Newspapers like the *Hindoo Patriot* and the *Indian Mirror* now started condemning the strikers for their excesses. The first denounced the "socalled unions", the second wanted such organisations not to provoke strikes but to concentrate on

superintendent of the EIR made an attempt to throw the entire blame on outside elements who had allegedly tried to force the coolies out of the workshop and had assaulted the Europeans. In the end the Bengal government upheld the police version and by implication blamed the white officers—"The European employees of the railways are mostly silent as to the causes which led up the riots, but all the evidence available militates against the supposition that the men were contentedly at work when they were attacked by a body of men from outside...the disturbance must have arisen inside and the evidence on the whole seems to show the gates were closed." No. 887P of 5 February 1907 from Government of Bengal to Government of India (Commerce and Industry Department)—Home Public Progs B, March 1907, n. 90.

[181] *Bengalee*, 7 September 1906.

[182] *Ibid.* Also Home Public Progs B, February 1907, n. 65-67.

[183] Abstract of Reports regarding the Antipartition Agitation during the second half of August (25 September 1906)—para 5. Home Public Progs B, October 1906, n. 13.

"peacemaking".[184] A few of the leaders wanted to press the movement further, and after an ultimatum sent by Premtosh Bose to the railway authorities (on his own responsibility, A. C. Banerji later complained[185]), a strike started in the Asansol region on 5 September. According to official reports, this was joined by "practically all the clerks of the traffic department of the railway at Asansol, most of those in the locomotive department, and from 75 to 100 men on stations along the line near Asansol... The strikers, it is reported, are trying to bribe the menials who have not struck to induce them to do so, but the traffic department of the railway are giving gratuities of Re 1 and Rs 2 to their menials and they are not therefore likely to strike"[186]—this of course not being a bribe. The railway authorities promptly brought cases against nineteen of the strikers for neglect of duty,[187] while considerable tension was caused by the violently hostile and aggressive attitude taken up by the European employees towards the Indian strikers.

Meanwhile, as A. C. Banerji tells us, moderate leaders like Surendranath Banerji, Taraknath Palit, Bhupendranath Bose and Krishnakumar Mitra had held a meeting at the Indian Association Hall. They too wanted the strike to be "kept up so as to enable them to move the government to remove the grievances of the strikers";[188] at the same time, as the sequel showed, they were probably getting rather worried by some of the actions of Premtosh Bose and A. K. Ghosh. So they decided to send "a strong and tactful man" to take charge of things at Asansol, and the choice fell on A. C.

[184] *Hindoo Patriot*, 31 August 1906. *Indian Mirror*, 1 September 1906 (RNEP(B) for week ending 8 September 1906).
[185] *Bengalee*, 4 October 1906. Letter of A. C. Banerji entitled "Railway Union" reprinted from the *Indian Mirror*. This is sharply critical of Premtosh Bose and A. K. Ghosh.
[186] Paras 2 and 6 of No. 2122 P.D. of 17 September 1906 from Government of India (Home)—Home Public Progs A, April 1907, n. 1-5 (Strike on the East Indian Railway at Asansol).
[187] *Ibid*, para 6.
[188] A. C. Banerji— Unpublished Autobiographical Fragment.

Banerji.[189] Banerji helped to raise the morale of the strikers by holding a series of open-air meetings amidst conditions of much excitement and some real danger, with a mob of Anglo-Indians shouting abuse and burning him in effigy. He showed courage also in staying on in Asansol despite repeated warnings from the local superintendent of police that his life might be in danger.[190] But at the same time A. C. Banerji seems to have made an attempt to ease out A. K. Ghosh and Premtosh Bose from the positions of authority in the union which they had held from the beginning. A new list of office-bearers was drawn up, consisting of very distinguished men most of whom, however, had been unconnected with the strike so far—Surendranath Banerji president, Krishnakumar Mitra and Prabhatkusum Roychaudhuri secretaries, Bhupendranath Bose treasurer, and as one of the vicepresidents—of all persons—Rabindranath Tagore.[191] A. K. Ghosh and Premtosh Bose objected to this attempted reorganisation[192]—not unnaturally perhaps—and while the leaders quarrelled, the strike itself went to pieces. About a hundred employees of the Howrah and Asansol sections eventually lost their jobs; repressive measures were taken at Jamalpur also where the management broke its promise (and even promoted the unpopular Macmillan); and cases were brought against some of the ringleaders.[193] Some of the dismissed men started a

[189] *Ibid.*

[190] *Ibid.* See also *Bengalee*, 7 and 8 September 1906.

[191] *Hindoo Patriot*, 8 September 1906 (Press-cutting preserved in the *Private Papers of Surjyakumar Ghoshal*).

[192] As A. C. Banerji complained in his letter published in *Bengalee*, 4 October 1906. Here he stated that "the strikers are miserably stranded, the present president and secretary being lamentably helpless and unable to cope with the situation", and that the union "as at present constituted" was of dubious value.

[193] *Bengalee*, 19 and 22 September, 10 October 1906. Basantakumar Banerji, an assistant at the Asansol traffic superintendent's office and the highest paid of the men prosecuted, was sentenced to a Rs 30 fine and forfeiture of one month's salary (Rs 110) by the Ranigunj subdivisional officer on 8 October 1906, for participation in union activities and joining the strike of 5 September. Evidently joining a strike was

swadeshi sales agency next door to the Anti-Circular Society office.[194]

In the wake of the Jamalpur incidents there occurred several strikes at other railway engineering centres, shortlived and getting relatively little nationalist response. The most important of these was the three-day strike from 4 to 6 September 1906 at the Bengal-Nagpur Railway Workshop of Kharagpur. High rice prices at the local bazar, absence of grain compensation allowance and, as the immediate occasion, a dispute over the terms of contract labour—led to a strike by the (mainly non-Bengali) workers which seems to have been very successful while it lasted, with only 300 attending out of 5,000 on 5 September. The use of religious sanctions is interesting—on 3 September "the ringleaders influenced a sufficient number of workmen to support their declaration that no one was to attend work the following day under the penalty, in the case of Hindus, of being made to eat cow's meat and, in the case of Muhammedans, pig's flesh". Bones and flesh of cows were collected at roadsides to pelt at willing workers. The railway authorities eventually promised to make "private arrangements for keeping down the price of rice in the bazar", though no grain allowance was to be given. There was no evidence of political instigation in this case, though the proximity of Kharagpur to Midnapur "where the swadeshi agitators are strong" worried home secretary Risley.[195] About 300 workmen of the East Bengal State Railway Workshop at Beliaghata struck on 16 October demanding extra puja allowances in view of the "trying times when

often considered a criminal offence in those days. No. 868P from Government of Bengal to Government of India (Home), 6 February 1907—Home Public Progs A, April 1907, n. 1-5.

[194] *Bande Mataram*, 20 February 1907.

[195] This account of the Kharagpur strike is based entirely on official sources—Report on Kharagpur Strike, from Government of Bengal to Government of India (Home), No. 2141-P. D. of 19 September 1906—Home Public Progs A, December 1906, n. 70-75. Risley's comment was in the form of a note dated 5 September 1906 on a telegram from the Bengal government reporting the strike.

the price of foodstuffs were (sic) very high".[196] At Jamalpur itself there was another strike on 15 November 1906 by the contract labour at the Iron Foundry. The demand was once again a grain compensation allowance, but the workers had learnt from the Asansol experience, and attended the foundry, only doing no work there.[197]

But in general the defeat of the EIR strike seems to have been a major setback for the morale both of the railway employees and the nationalist labour-leaders, and a lull set in which lasted for about a year. The Fortnightly Report from Bengal dated 8 October 1906 notes that "no new strikes have taken place... The strikes which have been engineered by the agitators have been a complete failure and the results are not such as to encourage further attempts."[198] A police report had alleged that some of the EIR strikers had accused their leader Nrityagopal Bhattacharya of feathering his own nest out of union subscriptions already in the middle of July,[199] and such accusations became common now that the strike had failed. A dismissed goods clerk of Ranigunj complained bitterly "that the leaders promised them all sorts of help when exciting them to the strike but now that the strike had not had the desired effect they are not even graced with a meeting with the leaders though they have danced attendance on many of them".[200]

In November 1907 the EIR hit the headlines again, this time due to a strike by its European and Eurasian drivers, firemen and guards demanding higher wages (including for example a Rs 220-260 scale for drivers).[201] The strike started at Asansol on 18 November, and soon spread all along the

[196] *Bengalee*, 20 October 1906.
[197] *Ibid*, 20 November 1906.
[198] Para 7 of FAR 2, 8 October 1906 (Fortnightly Report from Bengal) Home Public Progs A, December 1906, n. 144.
[199] Para 4 of Report on the Antipartition and Swadeshi Movement in Bengal, 7 September 1906. Home Public Progs B, October 1906, n. 13.
[200] Conversation recorded in Unpublished Diary of Satyakinkar Sahana, entry for 19 January 1907.
[201] *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 21 November 1907.

Howrah-Delhi line. The number involved was not large, but due to good organisation and the crucial positions held by the strikers in the railway set-up, both passenger and goods traffic were paralysed for more than a week[202]—something which the Indian employees had never managed to achieve. The Anglo-Indian press was sympathetic, the Jute Association demanded measures of conciliation—"no doubt due to to apprehension of compulsory stoppage of mills owing to want of coal",[203] and the government, pressed by the Bengal Chamber of Commerce, set up a board of conciliation including three employees' representatives.[204] By 30 November the strike was over, but the authorities insisted on the dismissal of its top leader, guard Engleken. There had also been a short strike on 24-25 November of the Bengal Nagpur Railway guards at Kharagpur.[205]

The attitude of the nationalist press towards such strikes by white employees was inevitably somewhat ambivalent. The *Amrita Bazar Patrika* was more concerned with the plight of stranded Indian passengers, and condemned the strike editorially.[206] The *Sandhya* on the other hand exulted: "The thorn is being extracted by the thorn—it is the feringhee who is bringing the feringhee to his senses", and urged the Indians "to take a lesson from these strikers as to the way a strike has to be organised", and to carry forward the "boycott movement with the vigour with which the feringhees are at the present time maintaining the strike on the

[202] "Traffic on the Chord and Grand Chord lines still completely interrupted"—runs part of Telegram No. 9772-9773 of 21 November 1907 from Commerce and Industry Department (Calcutta) to the Viceroy's Private Secretary—Home Public Progs B, November 1907, n. 254-268 (Strike of the Guards and Drivers of the East Indian Railway).

[203] *Ibid.*

[204] Telegrams No. 9841-9842 of 24 November and 9897-9898 of 26 November from Commerce and Industry Department to the Viceroy's Private Secretary—Home Public Progs B, November 1907, n. 254-268.

[205] *Ibid.*

[206] *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 22, 23, 27 and 28 November 1907.

EIR".[207] The *Bande Mataram* urged the necessity for strong unions with stable funds, and found in the EIR strike indications of "something like a revolution in the narrow limits of Anglo-Indian society. It is probably the first move for social equality by the Eurasian and poorer European community..."[208] And the *Bengalee* had a warm word of praise to spare for the dismissed leader, guard Engleken, "the one imposing figure amongst the EIR strikers", and revealed that he had been sympathetic to the Indian employees too in their 1906 struggle.[209]

The winter of 1907-8 also saw brief strikes by railway workshop hands at Samastipur (North Bihar), and by pointsmen at Chakradharpur on the Bengal-Nagpur line, and a bigger strike by the Indian (mainly Muslim) drivers and firemen of the Eastern Bengal State Railway.[210] The latter, numbering about 200, struck on 20 December after taking a vow on the Koran.[211] Their principal grievance was gross racial discrimination—an Indian driver was paid Rs 30 a month, a fireman Rs 12-15, while Europeans in similar posts got Rs 200 and Rs 80 respectively.[212] The strike dragged on till the middle of February, and was eventually broken with

[207] *Sandhya,* 21 and 23 November 1907 (RNP(B) for week ending 30 November 1907).

[208] *Bande Mataram,* 30 November 1907 (RNP(B) for week ending 7 December 1907).

[209] "Whoever stands for the rights and privileges of his brother men deserves our gratitude and admiration. Guard Engleken is the one imposing figure amongst the EIR strikers, whose name has created much enthusiasm in the country... We once met him at Asansol on a mission similar to this, and the unsolicited advice he gave us impressed us with his habitual sympathy for the oppressed in every community. His example should inspire the nationalists with the faith and courage which they sadly need at the present moment."—*Bengalee,* 28 November 1907.

[210] *Administration of Bengal under Andrew Fraser 1903-08,* Section on "Industrial Unrest", pp. 24-30.

[211] *Amrita Bazar Patrika,* 23 December 1907.

[212] *Howrah Hitaishi,* 28 December 1907 (RNP(B) for week ending 4 January 1908).

the help of European drivers loaned from the army.[213] Nationalist support this time seems to have remained confined to a few newspaper articles, the leaders being possibly too busy fighting each other at Surat. The two streams of nationalist and labour discontent were drifting apart again.

Jute Workers

Press employees and railway clerical staff belonged after all to the fringes of bhadralok society; the proletariat of the jute mills lived in a different world altogether. Nationalist interest in their affairs was inevitably much more limited and intermittent. Yet concern and sympathy were not entirely absent for the thousands working for European millowners—who, as a local paper pointed out in January 1904, were "gradually trying to occupy the same position as was formerly occupied by the powerful indigo-planters in Bengal".[214] The swadeshi period witnessed widespread unrest among jute workers, affecting at different times at least 18 out of the 37 mills in the province.[215] It was marked also by an attempt to start Indian Mill-Hands' Union for the operatives.

An official report mentions four strikes in jute mills in the autumn of 1905. Three of these were probably quite unconnected with the political movement. In October, a shooting accident in which two coolies were injured in place of a dog led to a strike at the Gauripur Jute Mill (24-Parganas) which was settled when the European assistant involved was

[213] *Bengalee*, 14 February 1908. Cf. also *Administration of Bengal under Andrew Fraser 1903-08.*

[214] *Sri-Sri-Vishnupriya-o-Anandabazar Patrika*, 13 January 1904 (RNP(B) for week ending 23 January 1904).

[215] The mills involved were—Naihati, Gouripur, Kankinara, Soorah, Arathoon, Baranagore, Union, Clive, Hooghly and Budge Budge in the 24-Parganas; India, Wellington and Hastings in Hooghly district; Sibpur, Delta, National, Belvedere and Fort Gloster in Howrah district. The *Statement of Industrial Labour for 1901-05* lists 35 mills altogether in Bengal, but does not mention the Naihati and the Belvedere mills.

fined by the magistrate and compensation offered to the affected men. On 14 October there was a two-day strike at the Hooghly Jute Mill (Garden Reach) by spinners protesting against fines and assaults by white overseers. The Muslim weavers of the Wellington Jute Mill (Rishra) struck in November feeling that insufficient joining time was being given by the authorities after the Ramzan fast.[216]

More serious and also partly political were the three successive strikes at the Fort Gloster Jute Mill (Bauria, in Howrah district)—whose 9,000-odd operatives were mostly Bengalis[217]—between October 1905 and March 1906. The immediate occasion for the first strike was the rakhi incident on 16 October (see above), though there was also an older dispute over hours of work—the management trying to change over to a daylight working day, the operatives fighting to retain "the same wages as when working extra time by electric light".[218] A fifteen-day strike ended with the management accepting many of the workers' demands.[219] But on 7 December a new dispute began when manager Forrester objected to the raising of the Bande Mataram slogan at closing time; the cry was "taken up by one department after another", and the European assistants trying to stop the uproar "were hustled about the place".[220] The manager knocked down two men "in selfdefence", and two ringleaders were arrested. The men promptly went on strike, and reportedly told the local superintendent of police—"all brothers in the mill, all brothers in Bengal; that in arresting the two men they had all been insulted".[221] The arrested mill-hands

[216] Report on the Agitation against the Partition of Bengal—letter from Government of Bengal, 25 January 1906, para 61—Home Public Progs A, June 1906, n. 175.

[217] *Ibid*, cf. also *Administration of Bengal under Andrew Fraser 1903-08, op. cit.*

[218] RIFLC (1908), Vol. II, pp. 274-75 (evidence of witness No. 187—D. C. Forrester, manager, Fort Gloster Jute Mill).

[219] *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 17 November 1905.

[220] *Ibid*, 18 December 1905.

[221] Home Public Progs A, June 1906, n. 175.

were eventually let off by the court with a warning,[222] and on 11 January 1906 manager Forrester assured A. C. Banerji (who had evidently started taking an interest in the dispute) that everything was now normal. The third strike started on 1 March 1906 over a complaint about the management cribbing time; a few days later seven clerks and four sirdars (three of the latter Muslim) were suddenly dismissed, and cases of obstruction brought against some of them. On the night of 12-13 March mill durwans, a mob of up-country coolies and some police constables launched a violent attack on the neighbouring village of Khajari where many of the workers lived, and indiscriminate arrests started next morning in an all-out attempt to break the strike. The *Howrah Hitaishi* published the whole story in two-and-a-half columns with banner headlines on 24 March 1906;[223] it also reported that Prabhatkusum Roychaudhuri had gone to Khajari to investigate. On 25 March Prabhatkusum wrote to A. C. Banerji—"What have you done for the poor unfortunate mill-hands of Ft. Gloster. I am doing all my poor powers can do. But with want of sympathy and want of money, I am placed in a most unfortunate 'big hole'. . . Kindly keep yourself free to go to Uluberia on Tuesday next. If possible, please see Mr Mitter and settle with him everything. Can you help me in raising a fund for these men? In spite of all help from the Calcutta Bar, I estimate the other law charges at about Rs 400 to Rs 500 in order to effectually defend these 15 men. Where is the money to come from: Please advise."[224] The case against the picketers went up to the high court, where Promotho Mitter, Bejoy Chatterji and Prabhatkusum Roychaudhuri appeared for the accused.[225]

The sack-sewers of the Union Jute Mill (near Sealdah) won their demand for increased wages through a brief strike

[222] *Bengalee*, 10 January 1906.

[223] The issue has been preserved in the *Private Papers of Surjyukumar Ghoshal*.

[224] *Private Papers of Aswinicoomar Banerji.*

[225] *Bengalee*, 5 May 1906.

on 12 February 1906.[226] Strikes in mills became more common from the summer of 1906 onwards. We hear of them at Arathoon (near Dum Dum) and Clive Jute Mill (Garden Reach) in August 1906—the latter due to the allegedly rude behaviour by a white official.[227] There were three strikes at the India Jute Mill (Serampore) in the course of a single year, starting respectively on 31 July and 17 December 1906 and 29 July 1907. Ill-treatment by supervisors once again seems to have been the main reason—a worker had been kicked and abused for leaving the loom to visit a sick relative, and the men were not allowed to go out even for the purpose of attending to calls of nature.[228] 350 workers at the Naihati Jute Mill struck on 15 October 1906 demanding wages equal to those of other mills.[229] There was a clash at the Bengal Cotton Mill (Garden Reach) on 29 November 1906 between spinners and weavers due to the refusal of the latter to join an agitation for an hour's extra leave, leading to a strike and police intervention. Five leaders—three of them sirdars—were eventually dismissed.[230] At the neighbouring Hooghly Jute Mill 4,000 workers struck on 27 November demanding better terms for night-work. The men were locked out; they remained defiant for nearly four months but eventually had to resume work on the old conditions.[231]

In 1907 strikes were "even more numerous", according to a government report which mentions those at Hastings, Wellington (both at Rishra), Clive, Arathoon and Soorah Jute Mills.[232] Strikes took place also at the Delta Jute Mill

226 *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 17 February 1906.

227 Report on the Antipartition and Swadeshi Movement in Bengal, para 12—Home Public Progs B, October 1906, n. 13. Also *Pioneer*, 18 August 1906.

228 *Bengalee*, 2 August 1906, 18 December 1906. *Bande Mataram*, 30 July 1907.

229 *Bengalee*, 16 October 1906.

230 *Ibid*, 1, 5 and 6 December 1906.

231 *Ibid*, 1 and 6 December 1906, 12 March 1907.

232 *Administration of Bengal under Andrew Fraser, 1903-08.*

(Sankrail) in September 1907,[233] and at the Beliaghata branch of the Baranagore Jute Mill next month.[234] In January 1908, a serious riot between up-country and Bengali labour led to a strike of the Bengali workers at the National and the Belvedere jute mills of Rajgunj (Howrah district).[235] In March 1908, 5,000 workers of the Kankinara Jute Mill struck after their bustee had been burnt down; there was some rioting; and the European staff used firearms in restoring order, wounding ten. The sequel was interesting from the point of view of British justice—the two whites who had fired were acquitted on the plea of selfdefence; the injured natives had to face a trial on the charge of rioting when they were discharged from hospital.[236]

Most of these strikes were probably entirely spontaneous and unorganised. Nationalist interest was of a very intermittent kind, as indicated by the scrappy and disconnected reports in the newspapers which also make reconstruction of the history of these strikes rather difficult. Nothing seems to have been done, for instance, to help the 4,000 men of the Hooghly Jute Mill in their four-month-long strike. Yet there were some nationalist efforts to organise jute workers, and that on a scale sufficient to worry government officials and infuriate the Anglo-Indian press. The *Pioneer* (Allahabad) of 21 July 1906 reported from Calcutta— "The socalled swadeshi movement is now taking even a more mischievous turn. Certain Bengali lawyers and others who have taken a prominent part in preaching the boycott of British goods... now employ their leisure hours in forming what they call trade unions amongst employees in large concerns

[233] Letter from head clerk Benodebehari Mookerjee to A. C. Banerji 12 September 1907—*Private Papers of A. C. Banerji.*

[234] *Amrita Bazar Patrika,* 22 October 1907.

[235] *Sandhya,* 3 January 1908 *(Private Papers of Surjyakumar Ghoshal), Howrah Hitaishi,* 1 February 1908 (RNP(B) for week ending 8 February 1908); RIFLC (1908), Vol. II, p. 234 (evidence of witness No. 157—H. T. S. Forrest, district magistrate, Howrah).

[236] *Bengalee,* 8 and 20 March 1908. *Daily Hitavadi,* 8 March 1908 (RNP(B) for week ending 14 March 1908).

managed by Europeans. Particular attention is paid to the jute mills in and around Calcutta. . .hitherto managers had the satisfaction of knowing that their men were free from outside influence. . ." At about the same time, a special branch survey of the districts for the period July-August 1906 reports the following from the 24-Parganas—"The Swadeshi leaders of Calcutta, principally A. C. Banerji, the barrister, have. . .in the past few weeks diverted their attention from the boycott in this district of foreign goods to the establishment of a mill-workers' union for the purpose of removing the grievances under which this class are supposed to labour. The strike at the Aratoon Jute Mills, near Dum Dum, and the Clive Jute Mills in Garden Reach Road may perhaps be traced to the malign influence exercised by these selfconstituted champions of the wrongs of the labourer. It is on record that when the Clive Mills workmen went on strike they were visited by a number of barristers of Calcutta, as well as Premtosh Bose, who strongly advised them to remain out on strike, assured them that they would get them back their arrears of wages and also prosecute the manager of the mills and get him convicted for assaulting the employees."[237]

[237] Report on the Antipartition and Swadeshi Movement in Bengal, (7 September 1906), para 12—Home Public Progs B, October 1906, n. 13. The passage cited here ends with the sentence. "Their carriage hire was paid by the strikers, and they were given a bottle of whiskey!" Such allegations of corruption are frequently made by the official reports against the swadeshi labour leaders—cf. the frequent use of the term "briefless barristers", and the charge that Premtosh Bose set up labour unions partly "to fill his own pockets from the subscriptions obtained from his unfortunate dupes—the strikers. . ." (Home Political Progs A, March 1910, n. 36). Without making heroes of these men, it may still be pointed out that there were surely easier ways of making money, and that barristers like A. C. Banerji and A. K. Ghosh seem to have been fairly successful men in their profession. It is interesting to note also that apart from the labour leaders, nationalist Muslims like Liakat Husain constitute the second major target of such official abuse. In both instances, the movement was on the point of transcending bhadralok Hindu barriers.

On 19 August 1906, the Indian Mill-Hands' Union was started with a two thousand strong meeting at Budge Budge. A. C. Banerji as president of the union (Prabhatkusum Roychaudhuri became its secretary) stated that European experience showed trade unions to be essential for the dignity of labour; he expressed his opposition to "hasty and injudicious strikes" at the same time. Union rules were drawn up and accepted with some reservations by James Slime and R. Duncan of the Budge Budge Jute Mill, who "bowed, in fact, kept bowing when the noble words, Bande Mataram, rent the welkin".[238] Budge Budge henceforward became the main centre of Banerji's activities, no doubt partly because of the unusually tactful attitude of the local mill management. From the winter of 1906-7 he had two agents working for him at this industrial township—Basantakumar Dutta, a local school-teacher, and a young dependant of his named Surjyakumar Ghoshal.[239]

A. C. Banerji's private papers throw some light on the working of the Indian Mill-Hands' Union at Budge Budge and its neighbourhood. Most interesting of all is a long memorial in Bengali addressed to Banerji from 28 workers of the Budge Budge Jute Mill beam department (some of them Muslims and Hindustanis, and all genuine proletarians —as indicated by the absence of surnames), dated 11 Paus 1313 (late December 1906). They declare themselves to be members of the union which he had started, express their readiness to attend his next meeting, and complain to him about the oppressive acts of the babus (clerks) and sirdars who get them in trouble with the management unless constantly placated by bribes. They also mention a dispute about the puja parbani—customarily demanded of them by the babus—which they had not paid this year owing to high prices. The memorial concludes with a request to A. C. Banerji to come and teach the head sirdar and the babus "a

[238] *Bengalee*, 21 August 1906.

[239] Dutta's profession is given in *Statesman*, 21 June 1907, *A. C. Banerji's Private Papers* include an undated Bengali letter from Surjyakumar Ghoshal begging for a job.

good lesson".[240] A letter from Basantakumar Dutta dated 3 February 1907 informs A. C. Banerji of a big meeting of mill-hands planned for the 10th; Surjyakumar Ghoshal, it states, would take the union president to the meeting place. A few days later Surjyakumar Ghosal (letter postmarked 20 February 1907) declares night-work to be the main grievance of the workers, and suggests a campaign in the press spot-lighting the wretched conditions of the child-spinners.[241] The idea seems to have borne fruit in a *Bengalee* leader of 20 March 1907 entitled "Factory Labour or Slavery" describing the excessive hours of work at the Budge Budge Jute Mill, and the employment there, "we are told" of "not less than 500 lads who are of very tender age". The note of surprise in the article unwittingly reveals how little the nationalists were aware of the life of factory labour—such conditions after all were nothing exceptional, as the Factory Commission Report shows.

The Mill-Hands' Union gradually extended the field of its activities, and by the end of 1907 it was coming to be known sometimes by the more ambitious name of the Indian Labour Union. In June 1907 the union helped to mediate in a strike at the Burmah Oil Company depot at Budge Budge.[242] Across the river in Howrah district, a union branch was set up in September 1907 after a strike at the Delta Jute Mill (Sankrail).[243] A. C. Banerji was active also in the dispute

[240] The original Bengali text of this memorial has been published in my article "Swadeshi yuger sramik andolan"—*Itihas* (New Series) Vol. IV, No. 2, Bhadra-Agrahayan 1376 (1969).

[241] Original text given in article cited above.

[242] The Anglo-Indian press traced the strike to the attempts of Budge Budge labour agitators to set up a union at the oil depot. The manager had "absolutely declined to recognise the Union in any way", and felt that the demands were "preposterous", as the men were getting "as much as Rs. 14/- per month" (*Statesman*, 21 June 1907). Basantakumar Dutta denied the charge of instigation, and said that the union's intervention had helped in fact to end the strike quickly (*Bengalee*, 6 July 1907).

[243] "I am glad to inform you that the workers have now joined to their work according to your proposal of the last meeting. They expect

at the National and the Belvedere jute mills (Rajgunj) in January 1908—there are six letters bearing on this subject in his papers. He arranged meetings through the 'burra babu' (head clerk) Gurupada Mukherji, but a letter from a subordinate at the National Jute Mill named Krishnapada Haldar mentions a possible double-cross at this level. Haldar makes the pragmatic suggestion that use should be made of the 'burra babu' for the present—he could be dealt with at a later date.[244] Like the Budge Budge memorial, this focuses on a major trade union problem not entirely absent even today in India. Organisation of a predominantly illiterate proletariat required the help of clerical intermediaries, but these employees were themselves often petty exploiters. The Rajgunj dispute ended in a workers' victory, with the management taking back all the dismissed hands of the Belvedere and National mills, promising to treat the men in future "with consideration and sympathy and without any rudeness", and agreeing to have talks with the union as regards the establishment of an "akhara" for the workers.[245]

The fame of A. C. Banerji as labour leader had reached Monghyr, and he received two letters from that Bihar town in July and August 1907 which must have surprised him considerably. They were from an Anglo-Indian labour contractor named Cadbert J. Trench engaged at the construction site of a factory being built by the Peninsular Tobacco Company (an American concern). Written in bad English, the letters reveal a deep sympathy for the Indian workers, who, he says "are under forced labour by these Americans".[246]

much of your help to form their 'Union' as they are quite ignorant about this." Head Clerk Benodebehari Mookerjee to A. C. Banerji, from Delta Jute Mills, Sankrail P. O., Howrah, 12 September 1907.

[244] Krishnapada Haldar (of Rajgunj National Jute Mill Engine Shop) to A. C. Banerji, 24 Magh 1314 (early February 1908). Original text in *Itihas, op. cit.*

[245] Undated note addressed "To A. C. Banerjee Esq., Bar-at-Law/ President, Indian Labour Union/In re Sankrail and Rajgunge Branch." The provision for an akhara or physical culture centre is interesting evidence of a link between union activities and the general samiti movement.

[246] Unpublished letter dated Monghyr 12 July 1907.

He wants the Calcutta leaders to come to Monghyr and set up a union to fight for an eight-hour day.[247] Meanwhile Banerji's agents at Budge Budge had also become involved in nationalist politics of a moderate variety. Basantakumar Dutta established a Rate-Payers' Association at Budge Budge in January 1907 with A. C. Banerji as president.[248] Surjyakumar Ghoshal published a pamphlet on the food problem in India, in which he tried to expound in simple language the nationalist explanation for the rise in prices.[249] Some years later he also wrote a biography of Surendranath.[250]

In January 1908, A. C. Banerji as "president of the Indian Labour Union" produced 16 weavers and spinners of the Budge Budge Jute Mill before the Factory Labour Commission. They demanded reduction in working hours to a twelve-hour day (6 a.m.—6 p.m.) i.e. the abolition of night-work.[251] The Muslim weavers of the Kankinara Jute Mill represented by Zahir-ud-din Ahmed's Mahomedan Association made similar demands; they also complained about oppression by babus and sirdars who "worked together"—"the head

247 I quote a passage from Trench's unpublished second letter (2 August 1907) : "I am unable to avail myself in getting the opportunity to go to Calcutta to see in [sic] private and consult on some essential points; so that all labourers could be brought into unity :—that it may be impossible for the employer forcing them to do other work than what they were actually engaged in on the small pay: and that it would not be in the employers or their assistants power to assault the labourers for alleged trifling faults. The subject of women being employed in Factory like those young English girls and women at home, ought to have a new *rule* for the Indian women's protection."

248 Basantakumar Dutta to A. C. Banerji, 3 Magh 1313 (January 1907).

249 *Bharate annakashta* (Budge Budge, 1314/1907). The pamphlet attributed the rise in prices to the exports of foodgrains and the increase in cultivation of jute; such exports were necessitated by the excessive import of foreign luxuries—and so swadeshi was the grand solution. The pamphlet is dedicated to Surendranath's son.

250 *Karmabir Surendranath* (1915).

251 RIFLC (1908). Vol. II, p. 278—Evidence of witnesses No. 192 and 193 (Kirtibas Mondal, Gopalsang Baru, Bipinchand Bairagi, Loku Ramzan, Umedali Malikhina, weavers; and Kirtibas, Bholanath and 9 other spinners of the Budge Budge Jute Mills).

sirdar received about Rs 30 from the mill, and made at least Rs 100 a month in dasturi". Sirdars nevertheless were members of this association.[252] The plea for reduced hours—in fact, a rather radical demand for an eight-hour day—had already been made by the weavers of the Hastings Jute Mill (Rishra) in a formal petition to the Bengal government in July 1906. The government rejected it after some discussion, the Hooghly civil surgeon stating that such reduced hours would make factories unprofitable in Indian conditions (since the natives work in a "slack and indifferent manner"), and that in any case the weavers were fairly healthy, except for occasional dyspepsia through "overfeeding".[253] Comment seems superfluous.

Aswinicoomar Banerji in his old age recalled with pride his work among the mill-hands. The description given by him contains some exaggeration, but it will still bear extensive quotation. "All the jute mills lying to the south of Calcutta up to Budge Budge, with more than 50,000 mill-hands were organised by him under the name of Mill-Hands' Union. His influence with the mill-hands was so great and his discipline so complete that he could make them do whatever he liked. He always told them that it was the slave who tempted, invited, nay, compelled tyranny and that if they could only return 2 blows for one, their burra shahebs instead of treating them as mere beasts of burden would begin to respect them... As a leader of the mill-hands he enjoyed their unbounded confidence but became a terror with mill-owners. Messrs Andrew Yule and Co used to place at his disposal their steam launch whenever called upon to do so in order to enable him to go and address the mill-

[252] *Ibid*, pp. 263-65, 270-71—Evidence of witnesses No. 176 (Kazi Zahir-ud-din Ahmed, who gave the facts about exploitation by babus and sirdars), No. 181 (Mohammed Zulfaquar Hyder), and nos 182-84 (Imaman Imanisher and Bakarali Imaman, weaving sirdars, and Abdul Razak Tajmahomed, weaver, of Kankinara Mills).

[253] Government of Bengal, General Miscellaneous Progs B, January 1907, n. 41-44; March 1907, n. 53-55.—Petition from the weavers of the Hastings Jute Mill, Rishra.

hands inculcating socialistic principles. This he used to do 2 or 3 times a month and sometimes oftener. At one time a European of outstanding personality, no less a person than Mr Shirley Tremedue, the proprietor and editor of *Capital*, approached him on behalf of the owners of 12 mills and offered to pay him per month Rs 150 for each mill, saying that the amount would be paid to him as remuneration for acting as an arbitrator whenever there was any dispute between the mill authorities and the mill-hands in order to prevent all strikes and troubles in future and that the mill-owners would always accept his decision as final. Mr B. said that he would be glad to act as an arbitrator as proposed but that the mill-hands must be told that he was being so paid. If after that he still enjoyed their confidence he would gladly accept the offer. Mr Tremedue jibbed at that, and there what evidently was an attempt to buy over Mr B ended."[254]

A. C. Banerji was prominent also in the big strike at the Kidderpore Royal Indian Marine Dockyard (March-April 1908). A strike of 400 jetty coolies the previous November had been easily crushed, all the men being dismissed.[255] The dock strike involving about 2,000 men which started on 11 March 1908 was a much more serious and organised affair. It had been preceded by three petitions (all of them ignored) demanding a grain compensation allowance in view of "the prevailing market rate of foodstuffs being exceptionally high", pension benefits similar to those enjoyed by other government employees, and paid holidays.[256] The men wanted only a promise for a sympathetic consideration of their grievances—the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* praising the tone of their petitions as "the reverse of defiant or disrespectful; in fact, it is what it should be, coming as it does from ser-

[254] Unpublished autobiographical account—*Private Papers of A. C. Banerji.*

[255] *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 28 November, 17 December 1907.

[256] *Bengalee*, 12 March 1908, gave the news of the beginning of the strike, *Statesman*, 18 March 1908, listed the major demands of the strikers.

vants".[257] But the authorities were adamant. A. C. Banerji started holding regular nightly meetings of the strikers near Bhukaylas raj palace, and told a correspondent of the Indian *Daily News* that the men were members of his Indian Labour Union.[258] One of his speeches—that on 23 March —found a place in a chronicle of major political events drawn up by the police three years later; he had allegedly declared that "he would make the feringhees fear them if all the Hindus and Mahomedans were like the strikers".[259] On 5 April, A. C. Banerji led a fund-raising procession of dock labourers through the streets of South Calcutta.[260] "It marched with about 7 to 8 hundred men, through Russa Road, Bhowanipur, Kalighat, Hazra Road and other neighbouring important streets till at about 3 p.m. they reached the home of Mr Asutosh Chaudhuri at Ballygunj", where they were "right royally entertained" at the end of a gruelling march on an intensely hot day.[261] Though Banerji was most prominent, police reports mention the involvement in the strike also of Premtosh Bose and Dr Sarat Mitter—popular Kidderpore doctor, Anushilan activist and the man who later allegedly tried to tamper with the loyalty of the 10th Jat Regiment.[262] The men eventually resumed work on the promise of a consideration of their grievances.[263]

In April 1908, the management of the Vulcan Iron Works in Central Calcutta snubbed an attempt by A. C. Banerji to mediate in a strike at this engineering concern. G. Peiral, the manager, returned his letter unopened with an angry scrawl over the envelope—"I will not open this letter

[257] *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 9 April 1908.
[258] *Bengalee*, 19 March; *Indian Daily News*, 20 March 1908.
[259] Statement of Political Offences Involving Breaches of Peace—Home Political Progs Deposit, April 1911, n. 7.
[260] *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 9 April 1908.
[261] Unpublished autobiographical account—*Private Papers of A. C. Banerji.*
[262] The connection of these two men with the dock strike is mentioned in the files demanding their deportation—Home Political Progs A, March 1910, n. 34, 36.
[263] *Suprabhat*, Baisakh 1315.

or have any communication from (sic) any outsider."[264] Banerji's attempt to intercede on behalf of the Calcutta telegraph delivery peons was also unsuccessful. These poorly-paid employees had gone on strike on 27 February 1908 when a new officer named Newland reduced the rate for delivery of urgent messages from 3 to 2 pice.[265] The authorities promptly dismissed the peons, and curtly rejected A. C. Banerji's offer to negotiate on behalf of the strikers.[266] Bhupendranath Bose's attempt to secure the intervention of the home department also failed, Risley stating that the matter was quite outside his jurisdiction.[267] Much more successful was the strike of the better-paid and more strategically placed telegraph signallers in April 1908, after the dismissal of some of them on 9 April for go-slow tactics adopted as a protest measure against a new schedule of work. As in the case of the EIR drivers disruption of business led to the quick intercession of the Bengal Chamber of Commerce, and on 15 April the viceroy set up a representative committee to review the work-system. Pay scales of the signallers were also improved.[268] The two strikes formed part of a general unrest among post and telegraph employees which had an all-India character,[269] and left in its wake some or-

[264] A. C. Banerji preserved the envelope in his private papers.

[265] *Daily Hitavadi*, 29 February 1908 (RNP(B) for week ending 7 March 1908).

[266] *Bengalee*, 14 March 1908. Cf. also *Nayak*, 28 March 1908.

[267] H. H. Risley to Bhupendranath Basu, 19 March 1908, who passed on the letter to A. C. Banerji.

[268] *Administration of Bengal under Andrew Fraser 1903-08*, Section on "Industrial Unrest", *Bengalee*, 9, 11, 12, 14 and 21 April 1908.

[269] Thus 600 delivery peons had struck in Bombay in August 1906 (*Bengalee*, 17 August 1906). Telegraph messengers of Rawalpindi had gone on strike in September 1906 (*Ibid*, 15 September 1906). In February 1907 a 'Union of Postal Clerks' had been formed in Bombay (*Ibid*, 20 February 1907). There had been meetings of telegraph employees at Allahabad and Lahore in December 1907 (*Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 3 and 5 December 1907). The Calcutta delivery peons' agitation synchronised with strikes by their comrades at Bombay and Madras (*Bengalee*, 5 March 1908); there was a second strike at Bombay towards the end of the month (*Ibid*, 31 March and 1 April

ganisations like the Indian Telegraph Association (which sent a telegram to Minto on 30 March requesting his intervention in the signallers' dispute)[270] and a Postal League—about which our only information comes from a letter to A. C. Banerji dated 23 December 1908. This letter ("No. 73") from, "S. C. Sen, secretary, Postal League, Dacca", stated that "a large number of petitions regarding the grievances of postal officials of subordinate grades have been submitted (to) the Director-General from different Postal circles all over India and Burma from March to May 1908", and requests A. C. Banerji to try and persuade the director-general to set up a commission of inquiry.

Nationalist interest in labour matters slumped suddenly and sharply from about the middle of 1908. I have not found a single reference to such issues in the private papers of A. C. Banerji after the end of 1908. The file on labour news kept by Surjyakumar Ghoshal is also virtually blank from 1908 to 1921. No doubt spontaneous strikes continued, though probably in reduced numbers; but Bengal nationalists had lost interest in them, having either gone back to the safe shores of old-style petitioning or plunged into the stormy waters of revolutionary terrorism. When the labour movement revived immediately after the war, it was led by men of a new generation, and its swadeshi prehistory was hardly ever recalled.

Yet a few links can be traced across the chasm of a decade. Prabhatkusum Roychaudhuri presiding over a mill-hands' meeting at Budge Budge on 2 January 1921 recalled the "previous history of Labourers' Union" at that centre, particularly its services in "helping in the passage of the present Factory Act with its restrictions on nightwork".[271] Surjyakumar Ghoshal stayed on in Budge Budge, engaged in trade union work of a very moderate variety; in a maga-

zine article published after independence, he recalled that

1908). Rangoon telegraph signallers joined the Calcutta men in the strike of April 1908 (*Ibid*, 11 April 1908).

[270] *Bengalee*, 2 April 1908.

[271] *Servant*, 5 January 1921 (*Private Papers of Surjyakumar Ghoshal*).

"42 years ago the barristers Aswinicoomar Banerji and Prabhatkusum Roychaudhuri founded the 'Indian Labour Union' in this Budge Budge. The 'Mill Hands' Union' was active for many years here."[272] Most interesting of all—if also rather speculative—is the fact that an early police file on Narendra Bhattacharji describes him to have worked at one time "for that well-known agitator, A. C. Banerji".[273] Did this early contact with a labour leader have anything to do with the later transformation of terrorist Narendra into the communist Manabendranath Roy?

IV. Political Implications

The labour movement in swadeshi Bengal suffered from certain fairly obvious limitations. It was confined to the Calcutta industrial area and the railways, leaving two big sections of the working class—the miners and the plantation labourers—entirely unaffected.[274] Within this limited area,

[272] Surjyakumar Ghoshal, "Puratan katha", *Nutan Yuga*, 30 Sravana 1355 (1948), Independence Number.

[273] Home Political Progs A, March 1910, n. 34. M. N. Roy's *Memoirs* (1964) unfortunately tells us almost nothing about his terrorist days.

[274] How unaffected the tea plantations were by the swadeshi movement is revealed by a rather pathetic letter from a Mymensingh Suhrid Samiti volunteer named Narendra to Jitendra Ray which was seized by the police in course of certain searches during the winter of 1908-9. Narendra is writing from Fenchugunj (Sylhet) on 25 October 1907 and describes rakhi day in a tea garden—"I was so unfortunate that on that pure day I was in the Badarpur tea garden which was full of coolies. There is no swadeshi agitation, and moreover the sahebs of the garden are not good men. However all the babus prayed for three hours' time, which was not granted by the sahebs. I also joined the babus. The babus made some arguments with the sahebs, who then and there sent a wire to the Silchar police station"—the police came, "and all was quiet"—D. O. No. 936, Mymensingh, 28 January 1909, from J. R. Blackwood to R. Nathan included in Part III (Samitis in Mymensingh District) of Report on Samitis in the Dacca Division—Home Political Progs Deposit, April 1909. n. 2. There were, however, occasional spontaneous outbursts in the tea gardens—as early as August 1903, Curzon warned the secretary of state that relations between Assam planters and coolies were "entering

it was a movement mainly of the Bengali worker even in the jute industry, where mills like Fort Gloster or Budge Budge were the principal centres.[275] Despite the active role of some nationalist leaders, the strikes themselves were all essentially economic in nature. There was some labour participation on the first Partition Day, as we have seen, but it was never repeated despite efforts by certain leaders next year.[276] Arrests of political leaders like Pal, Upadhyay, A. C. Banerji or the Aurobindo group failed to set off protest strikes—in sharp contrast to what happened in Bombay during the Tilak trial. And the nationalists taking a sustained interest in labour matters were not exactly front-ranking leaders; the involvement of men like Surendranath, Bepinchandra, Upadhyay or Shyamsundar Chakrabarti was of a much more tenuous nature.

The present study has been confined to Bengal, but for the sake of the correct perspective it must be pointed out that in some ways the labour unrest in certain other parts of the country was more impressive. Like the movement of the postal employees, unrest in the railways had an all-India

upon a more acute and dangerous phase. The coolies are learning to combine, and very often, upon any provocation, they are apt to gather together and assault the European manager of the plantation." Curzon to Lord George Hamilton, 5 August 1903—Curzon Collection, MSS. Eur. F 111/162. (Correspondence with Secretary of State, 1903).

[275] Thus 315 out of the 325 weavers of Mill No. 1 at the Budge Budge Jute Mill came from neighbouring villages, and it was from this section that witnesses were produced by A. C. Banerji before the Factory Commission. RIFLC (1908), Vol. II, p. 278.

[276] "It is proposed to adopt picketing; close all bazars, shops and mills in and around Calcutta—Mr Yule (of Messrs Andrew Yule and Company) and Messrs Kettlewall, Bullen and Co have promised to close their mill and offices that day." Report on the Agitation and Swadeshi Movement in Bengal (7 September 1906), para 9—Home Public Progs B, October 1906, n. 13. But Police Abstract No. 42 of 27 October 1906 reports that the 16 October "demonstration in no way affected the working of the large mills, jute, cotton, etc. in Calcutta and the suburbs"—Home Public Progs A, December 1906, n. 310-11.

character. There were big strikes for instance at the Parel Workshop at Bombay in February 1907 and again in January 1908, and at Karachi in October 1907.[277] The *Bande Mataram* of 24 July 1907 reported the sacking of some Lahore railmen for singing 'Hindustan Hamara'. In an interesting secret note entitled "The Origin and Spread of Indian Discontent" (24 January 1910), the chief commissioner of the Central Provinces, R. H. Craddock, laid special emphasis upon the discontent of Indian employees in the railways, where "The scope for promotion is very limited, the contrast between the European and Indian staff more accentuated than in most branches of the public service". He added that "the behaviour of the railway staff may one day be a very serious factor in the political situation. Whatever be the causes, certain it is that the station-master and his class are very commonly to be found among the ranks of the disaffected."[278] The Calcutta Jute Mill strikes cannot be compared with those of Bombay textile workers from the point of view of the numbers involved. Thus in October 1905 there were massive strikes and riots demanding a twelve-hour day after the millowners had extended working hours considerably during the swadeshi boom, taking advantage of the introduction of electricity.[279] In April 1908 more than 10,000 were involved in strikes protesting against an 18-day month which the cotton magnates were trying to introduce on the plea of a severe slump in the China yarn market.[280]

The Indian working class made three major interventions during these years on political issues, and all of these took place outside Bengal. In May 1907, a general hartal and strike by Muslim and Sikh arsenal and railway engineering

[277] *Bengalee*, 2-3 February 1907, 21 and 23 January 1908 (Parel strikes). *Bande Mataram*, 26 October 1907 (Karachi Workshop strike).
[278] R. H. Craddock to Dunlop Smith, 24 January 1910. Minto Papers. Reel No. 3. M 986. (Letters and Telegrams from Persons in India, January-June 1910).
[279] *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 12-13 October 1905.
[280] *Bengalee*, 5 and 7 April 1908.

workers of Rawalpindi formed part of the upsurge in the Punjab which led to the deportation of Lajpat Rai and Ajit Singh.[281] The strike at the foreign-owned Tuticorin Coral Cotton Mills in February-March 1908 had been preceded by daily meetings at which Subramaniya Siva was reported to have declared that "if the coolies stood out for extra wages European mills in India would cease to exist". He had also spoken of the Russian example, and had stated "that the Russian Revolution had benefited the people and that revolutions always brought good to the world". The arrest of Subramaniya Siva and Chidambaram Pillai was followed by more strikes and serious rioting at Tuticorin and Tinnevelly on 11-13 March.[282] The *Bande Mataram* hailed what it called 'The Tuticorin Victory' as "a perfect example of what an isolated labour revolt should be", as well as a classic instance of successfeul "passive resistance", and compared it to the Transvaal struggle.[283] Tens of thousands of Bombay workers went on strike for six days and staged violent demonstrations when Tilak was sentenced in July 1908.[284] The significance of the Bombay events was immediately grasped

[281] *Ibid*, 4 May 1907.

[282] The above account is based on Home Political Progs A, June 1908, n. 95 (History of the Disturbances in Tinnevelly and Tuticorin in March 1908).

[283] "The Tuticorin Victory"—*Bande Mataram*, 13 March 1908 (reprinted in Haridas and Uma Mukherji: *Sri Aurobindo and the New Thought in Indian Politics*, 1964, pp. 286-88). I give some other passages from this very significant editorial—"There have been many labour struggles in Bengal, but with the exception of the printers' strike none has ended in a victory for Indian labour against British capital... every victory for Indian labour is a victory for the nation and every defeat a defeat to the movement... When men like Chidambaram, Padmanabha and Siva are ready to undergo exile or imprisonment so that a handful of mill coolies may get justice and easier condition of livelihood, a bond has been created between the educated class and the masses, which is the first great step towards swaraj."

[284] Cf. Home Political Progs A, December 1908, n. 149-169 (Disturbances at Bombay during the Trial of Bal Gangadhar Tilak, editor of the Kesari newspapers), and the detailed account given by A. I. Chicherov in Reisner and Goldberg, *op. cit.*

by Lenin—". . .in India the street is beginning to stand up for *its* writers and political leaders. The infamous sentence pronounced by the British jackals on the Indian democrat Tilak. . .evoked street demonstrations and a strike in Bombay. In India, too, the proletariat has already developed to conscious political mass struggle—and, that being the case, the Russian-style British regime in India is doomed!"[285]

Despite their limitations, the Bengal strikes still were a sufficiently new and striking phenomenon to touch off some interesting discussion in nationalist circles about their nature and political significance. The best contemporary analysis of the causes of the strikes was that given in the monthly journal *Swadeshi* in 1906 during the EIR movement. It attributed the "extraordinary frequency" of strikes to the rise in prices, inadequate salaries, and the "inhuman" behaviour of the white authorities. Rail strikes were not caused by swadeshi, it argued—rather "both the swadeshi movement and the strikes are products of the economic distress prevalent in the country today". The article concluded with a fervent plea for extending all support to the EIR strikes, with the success of which, it pointed out, was bound up the honour of the Bengali people.[286]

Indian nationalists of all brands still followed with avid interest the course of British politics, and apart from the strikes, the emergence of labour as a major electoral force for the first time in January 1906 must have impressed them considerably. Sisirkumar Ghosh, the founder of the *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, felt that though "The liberal victory is no doubt an opportunity. . . It is the new party, the labourites, who alone, if they prove true to their principles, are for Indians and Englishmen equally." He therefore urged Gokhale on 2 August 1906—"Be so good as to enlist the ardent sympathies

[285] V. I. Lenin, *Inflammable Material in World Politics*, 5 August 1908 (*Collected Works*, Volume XV, p. 184, Moscow 1963).

[286] "Dharmaghat o swadeshi", *Swadeshi*, Sravana 1313 (July-August 1906). I have given the original text of relevant passages of this article in *Itihas, op. cit.*, f.n. 238.

of Labourite members."[287] The British example probably explains also the rather startling letter by a B.P.N. Sinha in the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* of 22 December 1906 calling for a 'Labour Party in India'. The correspondent requested "Mr A. C. Banerji, Mr A. K. Ghosh and others who have taken up the cause of labour" to "consider the feasibility of organising a labour confederacy for United Bengal, and I believe Bihar, Assam and Orissa with Chota Nagpur will willingly join the same". A *Bengalee* editorial welcomed the rise of socialism in England—at the same time assuring its readers that socialism has "ceased to be a revolutionary movement".[288]

If the moderates remained content with such lib-lab politics, the more militant varieties of socialism attracted the extremists—Hyndman's *Justice* with its uncompromising anti-imperialist note,[289] news of big strikes in many different parts of the world[290] and even the example of the Russian revolutionaries.

Radical nationalists established some contact with the European socialist movement. The inaugural meeting of

[287] Sisirkumar Ghosh to G. K. Gokhale, 2 August 1906—Microfilms of Gokhale Papers, Reel No. 4, (File No. 199). The first extract is from an undated letter in the same file.

[288] "Socialism in England", *Bengalee*, 28 January 1908.

[289] Both A. C. Banerji and Surjyakumar Ghoshal subscribed to *Justice*, as shown by the extracts preserved by them in their personal papers. This weekly organ of the Marxist Social-Democratic Federation condemned in uncompromising language both liberal hypocrisy and the begging for "a few trumpery reforms" by the moderate Indians. "We shall welcome with rejoicing the day when Hindustan is relieved for ever from our hideous despotism", it declared (23 May 1908). In October 1907 Hyndman violently attacked Edward Bernstein—the father of revisionism—for his attempted apology for British rule in India. Bernstein's defence was cited by the *Pioneer*, while the *Bande Mataram* (31 October 1907) and the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* (14 October 1907) acclaimed Hyndman. The government banned the entry of *Justice* into India in July 1907 and again in 1909—(Home Political Progs A, August 1909, n. 36-39; Home Political Deposit, March 1908, n. 1).

[290] Thus the *Bande Mataram* of 13 May 1907 in its Foreign Notes section reported strikes from Cairo, France, Portugal, St. Lucia and Canada.

Shyamaji Krishnavarma's India House in July 1905 was marked by a speech by Hyndman asserting that "As things stand, loyalty to Great Britain means treachery to India." Organisation of strikes was given an important place in the programme of passive resistance urged in 1907 by Krishnavarma through the pages of his *Indian Sociologist*.[291] Madame Cama unfurled the flag of free India at the Stuttgart Congress of the Second International in August 1907.[292] Pal addressed a Hyde Park May Day rally in 1910, and got financial assistance from Shapurji Saklatvala, future communist MP.[293] Russian socialist emigres gave political and military training to Hemchandra Kanungo in Paris during 1907.[294]

There was some talk about the possibilities of applying socialist ideas to India too—though the 'socialism' was inevitably of a somewhat vague and woolly kind. We have no means of knowing today what kind of 'socialist' lectures A. K. Ghosh used to give to Anushilan recruits, or what 'socialistic' ideas A. C. Banerji tried to convey to the Budge Budge millhands. Judging from the written record, socialist talk in extremist circles was closely associated with the general denunciation of western materialist civilisation based on factory industry. Perhaps the inspiration came initially from Vivekananda, who after all had once called himself a socialist, and had spoken eloquently of the coming reign of the shudras.[295] In a number of interesting articles in the *Dawn* a few years before the swadeshi upsurge, Satischandra Mukherji had opposed western-style industrialisation on the ground that it inevitably produced intractable problems of capital-labour

[291] Indulal Yajnik, *Shyamaji Krishnavarma—Life & Times of an Indian Revolutionary* (Bombay, 1950), pp. 141, 232-33.

[292] Hemchandra Kanungo, *Banglay biplab-prachesta* (1928), p. 205.

[293] *Bande Mataram*, 23 August 1907. HEM(B) No. 59 (Political Activities of Pal, Savarkar and Madame Cama in England and the Continent up to 1911).

[294] Hemchandra Kanungo, *op. cit.*, pp. 204-16.

[295] Vivekananda, *Collected Works* (Centenary Edition), Volume IV, pp. 468-69; Volume V, p. 202.

conflict.[296] A more modernistic note however was struck in 1905 by Surendranath Tagore, who mentioned the possibility of the evils of industrialism being overcome by a revolt of the workers, which he felt was imminent in the West, and which would set mankind free.[297] During the swadeshi years, the *Bande Mataram* printed news of revolutionary movements in the West and even socialist songs (one of them ending with the refrain "By the Red Flag of freedom we swear");[298] at the same time it endowed traditional Hindu society with all the virtues of socialism. Caste rules (minus some modern abuses) "had the true socialistic aim of keeping awake in every class of the society a sense of duty to it... they soften the keenness of the struggle for existence by a judicious and workable system of division of labour".[299] "Socialism is not an European idea, it is essentially Asiatic and especially Indian."[300]

What really struck the imagination of at least some of the nationalists was the efficacy of the strike as a possible political weapon. The Russian revolution had revealed this to the world, stated the *Daily Hitavadi* as early as December 1905.[301] Dhirendranath Chaudhuri writing in the monthly *Nabyabharat* identified "passive rsistance" with "dharmaghat"—the in-

[296] "Aspects of Economic Life in England and in India, Past and Present" (*Dawn*, Vol. II, July-August 1899). "Advanced Economic Thought in the West: How to Solve the Labour-Capital Problem" (*Ibid*, Vol. III, January 1900). "The Indian Economic Problem—A Discussion with Sir George Birdwood" (*Ibid*, Vol. III, March-June 1900). All three articles are signed 'Editor'. The third talks about the horrors of the early years of the industrial revolution, as revealed in Engels's "State of the Working Classes in England in 1844" (*Ibid*, p. 263).

[297] Surendranath Tagore, "Adhunik arthaniti-shastra", *Bharati*, Paus 1312 (1905).

[298] *Bande Mataram*, 23 September 1907.

[299] *Ibid*, editorial of 17 September 1907 ("Liberty and Our Social Laws").

[300] *Ibid*, editorial of 21 September 1907 ("Caste and Democracy").

[301] *Daily Hitavadi* 4 December 1905 (RNP(B) for week ending 9 December 1905).

digenous term for a strike.[302] Two years later, the *Basumati* pointed out that while the unarmed masses cannot hope to fight modern armies, popular movements in the West had developed a new technique—"a new weapon, and that terrible weapon is the strike".[303] The *Bande Mataram* showed immense pride in the strikes, and tried to claim all the credit for organising them for the 'New Party' whose spokesman it was.[304] This claim was hardly justified by the facts, as we have seen—but embarrassed moderates like C. Y. Chintamani did not dispute what to them was a rather dubious honour.[305] The Maharashtrian extremist Khaparde even suggested in October 1906 that the coming Congress should pass a resolution on the "promotion of trade unions and prevention of injustices and hardship to workmen at the hands of employers"[306]—though he does not seem to have pressed the idea further. The *Yugantar* too occasionally talked about strikes, though in its case the more romantic image of action by small bands of heroes was never far distant.[307]

[302] Dhirendranath Chaudhuri, "Bharate prajaniti", *Nabyabharat*, Bhadra 1312 (1905).

[303] *Basumati*, 7 December 1907 (RNP(B) for week ending 14 December 1907).

[304] "Were there organised labour movements in the country even on a small scale?" (before the appearance of the 'New Party')—the *Bande Mataram* asked in its editorial, "Our Programme" of 20 June 1907, while trying to refute Rabindranath's charge at a Chittagong meeting that "no party is doing real work". In another editorial ("Why This Cry for Freedom", 7 September 1907) it mentioned "the National education, the organisation of volunteers, the labour strikes" as unexpected developments revealing the divine will behind the movement.

[305] In his article "Extremist Politics" (*Modern Review*, April 1907), C. Y. Chintamani mentioned "the formation of trade unions and the promotion of strikes" as part of the new methods being urged by the extremists. "That day is not yet", he argued, pointing to the failure of the EIR strike.

[306] *Bengalee*, 1 November 1906, giving the text of Khaparde's "Second Circular Letter" dated 9 October 1906.

[307] "A strike on a big scale has become a necessity for India. The time has come to vigorously stand on one's own legs...A number of workers, firmly resolute, strong-minded, without terror of death, are needed..."

Both strikes and speculation about their possibilities fell into the background after 1908, and history certainly is not very interested in what might have been. But it is important to remember that an alternative to individual terrorism was objectively present for a time, and that such an alternative might have based itself partly on an alliance between nationalism and labour unrest. The potentialities of this alliance were seen most clearly by two contemporary witnesses, the one with alarm, the other with a hope which was not realised, and with these we may conclude this survey.

"Let the politician agitate about and against the partition to his heart's content, but when he interferes unnecessarily, and threatens the welfare of the whole province by sowing discontent among the ignorant labourers with the object of using them as a weapon of coercion, it is time that a government of law and order asserted itself" (*Pioneer*, 27 August 1906).

"Those who work in the presses have an union of their own. The thousands of mill and factory hands also have several unions of this sort. If these unions could manifest their anger at the imprisonment of Bipinbabu through some effective action, that would inspire the entire country and strengthen the unity of the people. We hope that Babus Apurabakumar Ghosh and Aswinicoomar Banerji will do something along these lines. Our country's chains will never be broken until our workers learn selfsacrifice in these matters. The workers of Russia today are teaching the world the methods of effective protest in times of repression—will not Indian workers learn from them? . . . No worthier tribute can be conceived for Bipinchandra, the apostle of the gospel of freedom" (*Nabasakti*, 14 September 1907).[308]

"The Lessons of the Strike"—*Yugantar*, 21 December 1907 (RNP(B) for week ending 28 December 1907).

[308] The extract was preserved in the *Private Papers of Surjyakumar Ghoshal*. I have checked the source and the date by a reference to the RNP(B) for the week ending 21 September 1907. For the Bengali original, see *Itihas, op. cit.*

Chapter Six

TECHNIQUES OF MASS CONTACT

The impressive—if rather shortlived—broadening of the national movement which was the major achievement of the swadeshi era in Bengal could never have been attained without the use of new techniques of mass contact and the development of novel forms of organisation.

The old style of political 'agitation' had concentrated mainly on presenting through speeches, newspapers, pamphlets and petitions cogent arguments stating the nationalist views on the particular grievances of the day. As the primary objective was to convince public opinion in England—regrettably ill-informed yet assumed to be potentially sympathetic—that the Anglo-Indian bureaucracy was governing in a distressingly un-British manner, it was only natural that much of this propaganda was couched in English. There were quite a number of political associations on paper even at the district level—the Indian Association claimed 121 branches in 1895[1]—but their activity seems to have been of a rather intermittent kind, springing to life and drawing up memorials when the government did something particularly objectionable, but otherwise dormant except for formal meetings to choose delegates for a congress which was itself little more than a "three days' tamasha".[2] Politics was still entirely the preserve of the English-educated elite, which complacently arrogated to itself the title of natural leaders of the country,[3]

[1] J. C. Bagal, *History of the Indian Association 1876-1951* (Calcutta, 1953), Appendix F.

[2] As Aswinikumar Dutta described it in 1897 at the Amraoti Congress, Saratkumar Roy, *Mahatma Aswinikumar* (1926, in Bengali), p. 113.

[3] Gokhale used this expression in his presidential address to the

and seldom felt the necessity for active mass participation in nationalist politics.

There had been some exceptions, of course, and occasional moments of high excitement. Surendranath's imprisonment in 1883 had led to the first open-air political meetings in Calcutta.[4] The Indian Association had organised peasant rallies on the eve of the Rent Act of 1885[5] and a huge meeting of villagers at Jhinkergachha (in Jessore) had protested against the chowkidari tax in 1886. In 1890-91 the age of consent bill had been fought with a passion worthy of a better cause.[6] In the late '80s, Hume worked out "an elaborate scheme" for permanent district associations to serve as the basis of the Congress, but nothing concrete was achieved.[7] Meanwhile, through quiet and sustained humanitarian work among the villagers Aswinikumar Dutta was building up a solid base for nationalism in Barisal, and the associations he set up among his students were the prototype of the samitis of the swadeshi age. Yet by and large politics remained a respectable and rather dull affair, being no more than a part-time occupation even for the acknowledged political leaders, requiring little in the way of personal sacrifice and certainly far less courage than that demanded of a social reformer.

1905 changed all that, at least for some years. The press and the platform were used more intensively than ever before, but to preach the new creed of radical nationalism rather than to petition the authorities, and a great emphasis on the vernacular followed inevitably from this change in outlook. Efforts were made to strike roots in the countryside through

Benares Congress (1905). Quoted in K. P. Karunakaran, *Modern Indian Political Tradition* (1962), p. 102.

[4] Surendranath Banerji, *A Nation in Making* (1925, 1963) pp. 73-74.

[5] Anil Seal, *The Emergence of Indian Nationalism* (1968), pp. 222-24.

[6] Both these events were recalled by the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* in its editorial of 7 August1905, which urged the swadeshi leaders to emulate such precedents.

[7] Risley recalled this abortive effort in his comments (dated 3 January 1910) on certain pamphlets regarding village and district associations in Bengal—Home Political Progs Deposit, July 1910, n. 3.

social work in the villages. Coldly rational arguments gave place to an appeal to the emotions and the imagination, through songs, plays and jatras, patriotic festivals and the rakhi-bandhan rite. Nationalism acquired a mystic tone, and contact was sought with the uneducated masses through the forms and sanctions of traditional Hinduism. Where persuasion and sentimental appeals failed, the short-cut of coercion was also used—social boycott, upper-caste pressures, direct zamindari intimidation—with results ultimately disastrous.

Organisationally too 1905 marks the beginning of a new age. In place of the "rings of lawyers"[8] monopolising the politics in the mufassil, we have the sudden emergence of the samiti or 'national volunteer' movement. All too often have these been considered purely as embryonic forms of terrorist societies; contemporary sources—both official and nonofficial—convey quite a different impression of a movement which was much more broadbased down to 1908.

In this and the following chapter, I have made an attempt to analyse in some detail the communication media and organisational forms developed by the swadeshi movement in Bengal. Such a study might help us to appreciate both the considerable achievements of the age in providing nationalism with a mass base, and the causes of the ultimate decline of the whole movement.

I. The Press and the Platform

For more than twenty years, the nationalist cause in Bengal had been propagated mainly through two English-language dailies—the *Bengalee* of Surendranath Banerji, and the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* started by Sisirkumar Ghosh and edited during the swadeshi period by his brother Motilal. A police report dated March 1904 describes the *Bengalee* as "the most influential with the educated Indians", "well-reasoned and

[8] Bepinchandra Pal used this expressive phrase in his article "The Shell and the Seed", *Bande Mataram*, 17 September 1906. Quoted in Haridas and Uma Mukherji, *Bepin Pal and India's Struggle for Swaraj* (1958), p. 60.

sensible" in its criticism of official policies, and "inclined to welcome the introduction of western institutions". The *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, on the other hand, was socially more orthodox—"Its patriotism despises European methods and institutions";[9] in politics it enjoyed a radical reputation, and was felt to be more consistently antigovernment.[10] But the differences were really of degree rather than kind, and much of the perennial rivalry between the two leading nationalist journals in Bengal seems to have been due to personal factors.[11] Of the other Indian-owned English papers, the once renowned *Hindoo Patriot* had long since degenerated into a loyalist journal of negligible influence, while Nagendranath Ghosh's weekly *Indian Nation* was better-edited but almost equally moderate. The *Indian Mirror* had been critical of Curzon and the partition at its earlier stages, but its editor Narendranath Sen (the rather embarrassed mover of the boycott resolution on 7 August 1905) moved steadily to the right with the years, till we meet him as the promoter of a government-subsidised vernacular weekly to fight anarchism on the eve of his death in 1911.[12] The future extremist leader

[9] No. 284 S. B. (Confidential) from F. C. Daly (officer in charge of Bengal special branch) to the Chief Secretary of the Government of Bengal, Calcutta 19 March 1904. Report on native-owned English newspapers—*Annual Report on Indian Papers*, Volume IV (1903-1919), pp. 27-28.

[10] Government of Bengal to Government of India (Home Department) No. 205P, 25 January 1906—Report on the Agitation against the Partition of Bengal, paras 1-2—Home Public Progs A, June 1906, n. 175.

[11] In the 1870s Sisirkumar Ghosh's India League had been displaced by Surendranath's Indian Association as the premier political organisation of Bengal under circumstances which still remain somewhat obscure. Motilal Ghosh's biographer candidly states—"Motilal, I am constrained to say, had all along a feeling of rivalry for Surendranath"—P. Dutt, *Memoirs of Motilal Ghosh* (1935), p. 335.

[12] The weekly—25,000 copies of which were to be bought and distributed free by the government—was declared to be a revival of Keshabchandra Sen's famous *Sulabh Samachar*. After Narendranath's death the paper was edited for a few months by Jaladhar Sen, till the government dropped the entire project after the abrogation of

Bepinchandra Pal had his own weekly—the *New India*—from August 1901. A special branch report dated March 1908[13] gives the following estimate of the circulation of these older dailies and weeklies: *Bengalee* about 11,000; *Amrita Bazar Patrika* 7500; *Indian Mirror* 1000; *Hindoo Patriot* 800, *Indian Nation* 500, *New India* 1500. The figures for the leading Anglo-Indian newspapers were—*Statesman* 4000 (but rising very rapidly to 12,000 in 1909 and 18,200 in 1911); *Empire* 3500 (15,000 in 1911);[14] *Englishman* 3000; and *Indian Daily News* 2500.

Vernacular dailies were surprisingly few in number—five in July 1905, all from Calcutta, and of them only the *Daily Hitavadi* and the *Sandhya* with political significance. But weeklies were extremely numerous—57 in Bengali in 1905, of which 18 were from Calcutta (as well as three in Hindi and one in Persian), 13 from Burdwan division, 8 from Dacca, 7 from presidency, 6 from Chittagong, and 5 from Rajshahi.[15] The most influential Calcutta weeklies were the *Hitavadi* (edited by Kaliprasanna Kalyabisharod from 1894 to his death in 1907); the *Basumati* (run by Jaladhar Sen and Dinendrakumar Roy); the *Bangabasi* founded and edited by Jogendrachandra Basu till his death in August 1905; and Krishnakumar Mitra's *Sanjibani*.[16] In July 1905 their subscribers were officially estimated to be 16,000, 13,000, 9000, and 3200 respectively.[17] Four years later *Hitavadi* had run up to 30,000, the *Basumati and Bangabasi* sold about 15,000

the partition. Brajendranath Bandopadhyay, *Sahitya-sadhak-charitmala*, Vol. VI, No. 69 (1948), pp. 51-52.

[13] List of English and foreign newspapers published in Bengal revised up to 31 December 1907 (G. C. Denham, officer in charge of special branch, 13 March 1908)—*Annual Report on Indian Papers*: Volume IV (1903-1919), pp. 121-26.

[14] The later figures are taken from the *Annual Report on Indian Papers in the Bengal Presidency*, 1909, 1911, *Ibid*, pp. 149, 258-59.

[15] List of Vernacular Newspapers, given in RNP(B) for week ending 1 July 1905.

[16] For the editorial particulars I have found the biographies collected in the *Sahitya-sadhak charitmala* extremely useful.

[17] RNP(B) for week ending 1 July 1905.

each, while the *Sanjibani* had reached 7000.[18] The figures amply indicate the strength of social conservatism in Bengal —thus the *Hitavadi*, which at one time specialised in baiting Brahmos, and the *Bangabasi* (the avowed organ of Hindu orthodoxy which had carried its opposition to the age-of-consent bill to the point of getting involved in a sedition case) obviously far outstripped in popularity the progressive weekly edited by the staunch Brahmo leader Krishnakumar Mitra. In 1909 the official survey of all newspapers and periodicals in the Bengal presidency noted the predominance of Brahmins and Kayasthas among the editors (25.4 per cent and 20.96 per cent respectively); Brahmos numbered 8.53 per cent (far in excess of their proportion in the general population); while there were only 17 Muslim editors, a paltry 5.39 per cent.[19]

The established newspapers by and large faithfully echoed the ups and downs of the moderate campaigning against the partition. Repetition ad infinitum of the logical arguments against the official scheme;[20] a new "truculent and threatening" tone in place of "wailing antagonism" as the Japanese victories cast their shadow;[21] acceptance after some hesita-

[18] Annual Report on Indian Papers in the Bengal Presidency for 1909 —*Annual Report on Indian Papers*, Volume IV (1903-1911), p. 149.

[19] The detailed statistics are : Total number of journals (including both English and vernacular newspapers and periodicals) 315. Editors : 80 Brahmins (25.4%), 66 Kayasthas (20.96%), 7 Vaidyas (2.22%), 36 other Hindus (11.43%), 27 Brahmos (8.58%), 2 Jains (0.64%), 17 Muslims (5.39%), 56 Christians (17.78%), 24 unknown (7.61%). *Ibid*, p. 147.

[20] Even the *New India* at first struck no new note, confining itself to conventional criticism of Risley in its issues of 14 and 21 January 1904. The *Sanjibani* did its best to keep the movement alive at a time when most of its contemporaries were complacently interpreting the silence of the government to mean the abandoning of the scheme, but its re-current war-cry during 1904 was for a deputation to England to pressurise the secretary of state—cf. for instance the editorial entitled "Banger angachhed", 6 Sravana 1311 (21 July 1904).

[21] Report on the Agitation against the Partition of Bengal—Government of Bengal to Government of India (Home) No. 205P of 25 January 1906, para 13. Home Public Progs A, June 1906, n. 175.

tion of the boycott call initiated by *Sanjibani*;[22] and a rather pathetic alternation between bouts of verbal violence and periods of renewed faith in 'Honest John' Morley, with the tide setting strongly towards the safer shores of 'constitutional agitation' as the government empowered itself with the authority to seize presses in June 1908[23]—the pattern is familiar and not particularly interesting.

Extremism, however, had in the meantime developed its own organs in the shape of a number of new journals, whose brief and stormy lives form a memorable epoch in the history of the Indian press. During the first months of the boycott movement, a rather obscure Calcutta weekly named *Pratijna* (edited by ex-subinspector of police Jyotilal Mukherji, and with a circulation of only 700 in July 1905)[24] called on the leaders to "give up making petitions" (26 July); hailed Bepinchandra Pal's demand for "complete national self-government"; urged the adoption of passive resistance" to realise it (23 August); and even—in an article entitled "Appeal to Blows" on 30 August—wanted police informers to be given "a good thrashing".[25]

[22] The laggards deserve a passing notice—the *Indian Nation* supported "legitimate" swadeshi, but not the "silly device" of the boycott (7 August and 14 August 1905—RNEP(B) for weeks ending 12 and 19 August 1905); the *Indian Mirror* disliked student participation in politics (29 August 1905—RNEP(B) for week ending 2 September 1905); the *Bangabasi* was extremely lukewarm—an interesting and perhaps salutary reminder that religious revivalists were not always political radicals (12 August, 19 August, 16 September 1905—RNP(B) for weeks ending 19 August, 26 August and 23 September 1905). For the attitude of Muslim newspapers cf. below, Chapter VIII.

[23] Newspapers (Incitement to Offences) Act, VII of 1908 (8 June 1908). From 1909 onwards, the annual official survey of the Indian press reports a steady improvement in tone, with even the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* becoming more careful after the deportations—*Annual Report on Indian Papers*, Vol. IV, pp. 151, 159, 209, 259.

[24] Haridas and Uma Mukherji, *Upadhyay Brahmabandhab o bharatiya jatiyatabad* (1961), Appendix. RNP (B) for week ending 1 July 1905 (circulation figures).

[25] RNP(B) for weeks ending 29 July, 2 September and 9 September 1905.

Much more important and influential of course was the *Sandhya*, the famous evening daily started by Brahmabandhab Upadhyay in November 1904. The uniqueness of the *Sandhya* from the very beginning lay in its uninhibited use of the language of the streets and its vitriolic and often vulgar abuse of the feringhee and all who aped his ways. In its inaugural number it declared that the Vedas, Brahmin leadership and caste were all indispensable for the Hindu (strange words these, coming from a man who had been once a Brahmo and then for quite some time a Catholic). It advised its readers—"Whatever you hear, whatever you learn, whatever you do—remain a Hindu, remain a Bengali."[26] The abuse of the whites, the inculcation of a kind of race-hatred were all quite deliberate, the purpose being to break the spell or maya of British power and prestige. The goal—like that of all the extremist journals—was complete independence; the method—despite occasional talk of physical retaliation—passive resistance. The racy idiomatic Bengali, the pandering to religious prejudices, the uncompromising rejection of foreign and cultural domination—all combined to make the *Sandhya* immensely popular among the Hindu lower middle class; by January 1907 it had reached a circulation of 7000 and was unquestionably the leading vernacular daily of Calcutta.[27]

In 1907 Brahmabandhab also brought out for short while an illustrated weekly called *Swaraj*. This too was marked by a strong Hindu note, with articles and pictures about Bankimchandra, Ramkrishna and Vivekananda. In politics, it called for 'swadeshi thanas' or selfdefence organisations in face of the Comilla and Jamalpur riots, but felt that there was no necessity for secrecy in such matters, since the aim was the perfectly legitimate one of protection of the Hindus against 'feringhi-backed Muslim lawlessness'.[28] From May

[26] Quoted in Probodhchandra Sinha, *Upadhyay Brahmabandhab* (n.d.), pp. 81-83.

[27] Its only major rival—the *Daily Hitavadi*—had a circulation of only 2000. (RNP(B) for week ending 5 January 1907).

[28] The first twelve issues of this weekly, dated 26 Falgun 1313--

1907 the extremist creed was being expounded also through the pages of Monoranjan Guha Thakurta's *Nabasakti*. though in language much more chaste and sober and not as aggressively Hindu. It had a circulation of about 5000 in 1908, before the deportation of the editor ended its short life.[29]

Till August 1906, Bepinchandra Pal's weekly *New India* was the only English-language medium for the expression of the ideas of the Bengal extremists. But then came the famous daily *Bande Mataram*, in quality by far the best of all the extremist journals, edited for the first few weeks by Pal and then taken over by a very talented group of young men centring round Aurobindo Ghosh, and including Shyamsundar Chakrabarti and Hemendraprasad Ghosh. In October 1906 a limited company was started to finance the journal; the money, as police reports show, came mainly from Subodhchandra Mullick, who advanced Rs 10,021-2-9 for paper during the eight months succeeding the floating of the company.[30] In superb English, combining logic with passion, the *Bande Mataram* preached the gospel of the new nationalism; like the other extremist journals, it tried to give its politics a Hindu-religious colour, but the combination here was much more sophisticated than in the *Sandhya*. An official report states the number of its subscribers to be 2400 in May 1907, plus a daily cash sale in Calcutta from three to four thousand copies.[31] By the end of the year, the *Bande*

15 Asar 1314 (March-June 1907) have been preserved in the Bangiya Sahitya Parishad Library. I do not know if any later numbers were published. The first issue begins with a homage to Bankimchandra; No. 3 (10 Chaitra 1313) and No. 8 (22 Baisakh 1314) contain long articles on Ramkrishna and Vivekananda. The call for "swadeshi thanas" is in No. 3. No. 9 (5 Jyestha 1314) declares that not arms, but mass awakening is the need of the day.

[29] Government of Bengal to Government of India (Home) Pol. No. 710-D, 24 May 1909. *Annual Report on Indian Papers*, Volume IV, p. 129.

[30] Para 13 of Dossier of State Prisoner S. C. Mullick, Home Political Progs Deposit, November 1909, n. 9.

[31] D. O. from Government of Bengal to Government of India (Home),

Mataram's circulation had gone upto 7000.[32]

The *Sandhya*, the *Nabasakti* and the *Bande Mataram* all occasionally talked of violence, and their editorial staff included men with definite revolutionary connections, the foremost of them being of course Aurobindo himself. But for the consistent and unqualified exposition of the creed of revolutionary terrorism we have to turn to the *Yugantar*, the weekly launched in April 1906 by Barindrakumar Ghosh, Abinash Bhattacharyya and Bhupendranath Dutta, with an initial capital of only four hundred rupees, and with the advice, from behind the scenes, of Aurobindo, Abinash Chakrabarti and Sakharam Ganesh Deuskar.[33] The *Yugantar* for quite some time had a negligible circulation; at one point only eighteen copies were being sold in Calcutta, and that through a Muslim hawker of *Sandhya*.[34] As late as May 1907, a government report estimated its sales to be no more than 200.[35] But then quite suddenly its circulation began to rise by leaps and bounds—to 7000 on the eve of Bhupendranath's imprisonment in July 1907, and to no less than 15,000 in the latter half of 1908 just before the paper was finally suppressed by the police.[36] The *Yugantar* criticised the theory of passive resistance as inadequate, and openly called for violent revolution—"Without bloodshed the worship of the goddess will not be accomplished."[37] By

20 May 1907. Home Public Progs Deposit, July 1907, n. 66.

[32] Denham's Report on English Newspapers, 13 March 1908, *op. cit.* *Annual Report on Indian Papers*, Volume IV, p. 121.

[33] Dr Bhupendranath Dutta, *Bharater dwitiya swadhinata sangram* (3rd edition, 1949), pp. 24-26. The name Yugantar, Bhupendranath tells us, was taken from the title of a novel by Sibnath Sastri, the Brahmo leader.

[34] *Ibid*, pp. 141-42.

[35] D.O. from Government of Bengal to Government of India (Home), 19 May 1907. Home Public/Political Progs Deposit, July 1907, n. 66. But the figure is according to the last returns, and "it is believed that, of late, the circulation has increased considerably".

[36] Bhupendranath Dutta, *op. cit.*, p. 144. *Annual Report on Indian Papers*, Volume IV, p. 129.

[37] The passage continues—"And what is the number of English

revolution it came to mean increasingly action by an elite—"Never did the people as a whole in any country prepare themselves for riots, nor will they ever do so." The heroic selfsacrifice by the few, it felt, was the only way to wake the country and convince the people "that they have the power to gain freedom"—

> *"Without blood, O patriots!*
> *Will the country awake?"*[38]

The vernacular weeklies of the mufassil also notably contributed to the spread of the swadeshi spirit. The *Charu Mihir* of Mymensingh edited by the local pleader Baikunthanath Shome bitterly opposed the partition plan from its earliest stages;[39] the publication in it in May 1907 of an anti-British appeal by Liakat Husain led to a police raid on its office.[40] The *Barisal Hitaishi* edited by Durgamohan Sen (ex-student and teacher of the Brojomohan Institution) was very closely associated with Aswinikumar Dutta's Swadesh Bandhav Samiti.[41] Its militancy earned for it the distinction of being the first mufassil journal to be prosecuted for sedition. Proceedings were started against its printer-publisher and editor on 6 September 1907, and Durgamohan was even-

officials in each district? With a firm resolve you can bring English rule to an end in a single day... Begin yielding up a life after taking a life." *Yugantar*, 3 March 1907—RNP (B) for week ending 9 March 1907.

[38] *Yugantar*, 26 August 1907—RNP(B) for week ending 31 August 1907. For a fuller discussion of the theory of revolutionary terrorism, see above Chapter II.

[39] In its issue of 15 December 1903 the *Charu Mihir* refused Risley's arguments—"Dacca and Mymensingh are not more like Assam than is Mr Risley like an Armenian"—and called for a "violent agitation" against the proposed transfer. RNP(B) for week ending 26 December 1903.

[40] *Bande Mataram*, 22 August 1907.

[41] Note on the Swadesh Bandhav Samiti by R. Nathan—*Report on Samitis in the Dacca Division*, Part II, p. 73. Home Political Progs Deposit, April 1909, n. 2.

tually sentenced to a year's rigorous imprisonment.[42] Other district newspapers to be prosecuted during the next three years included the *Rangpur Vartabaha* edited by Joychandra Sarkar (in October 1907 and again in January 1910);[43] the *Purba Bangla* of Dacca (February 1909);[44] the *Khulnabasi* of Khulna; and the *Pallichitra* published from Bagerhat (January 1910).[45] Gispati Kavyatirtha's *Howrah Hitaishi* and the *Jasohar* are also mentioned as mufassil extremist organs in an official report in 1909.[46]

Apart from an abortive proposal in December 1905 to prosecute the *New India* for an article abusing Fuller,[47] the government gave the nationalist press in Bengal a pretty long rope down to the middle of 1907—no doubt in the belief that such letting-off of steam would do no real harm. Soon after the Punjab events, however, official policy changed abruptly. The Bengal government was seriously considering the prosecution of the *Bande Mataram*, the *Sandhya* and the *Yugantar* in May 1907, and the three journals were formally warned by the lieutenant-governor.[48] The government of India resolution of 3 June 1907 authorised local governments to take necessary measures to enforce the existing laws against seditious articles. Prosecutions came in a flood after July 1907, starting with the arrest of Bhupendra-

[42] Home Political Progs A, January 1908, n. 27-33.
[43] Diary of Events, 1907 and 1910. Home Political Progs Deposit, March 1908, n. 1, March 1911, n. 1.
[44] Diary of Events, 1909. Home Political Progs Deposit, March 1910, n. 1.
[45] Diary of Events, 1910. Home Political Progs Deposit, March 1911, n. 1.
[46] *Annual Report on Indian Papers*, Volume IV, p. 161.
[47] Home Public Progs Deposit, January 1906, n. 41. The advocate-general advised against prosecution, since Fuller might have been summoned as a witness in any such case. One of the original shareholders of the *New India* had been Bhupendranath Bose; in a letter to chief secretary Carlyle on 1 December 1905 and through an obviously inspired report in the *Statesman* of 7 December 1905, Bhupendranath hastened to disclaim all responsibility for the present politics of the weekly edited by Pal.
[48] Home Public/Political Progs Deposit, July 1907, n. 66.

nath Dutta on 5 July. The *Yugantar*, not surprisingly, was the principal target, no less than six cases being launched against it in course of little more than a year; the *Bande Mataram* and the *Sandhya* were prosecuted twice, and the *Nabasakti* once.[49] As the very frequency of such cases indicate, the prosecutions under the existing laws were not being particularly effective in curbing the radical press. The great defect from the government point of view was that the Press and Registration of Books Act (XXV of 1867) demanded the declaration of the names of the printer and publisher only, not of the editor. Bhupendranath Dutta boldly accepted sole responsibility for the incriminating *Yugantar* articles and was sentenced to a year's rigorous imprisonment on 24 July 1907,[50] and Brahmabandhab Upadhyay on the eve of his death denied in classic terms the authority of the alien court to sit in judgement over patriots engaged in the "God-appointed mission of swaraj".[51] But the other nationalist editors took full advantage of this legal loophole, following the example of Aurobindo at the first *Bande Mataram* trial—with the results that only a series of nominal printer-publishers (usually some unimportant swadeshi volunteer) could be convicted.[52] The nationalist press, however, was

[49] Diary of Events, 1907, 1908—Home Political Progs Deposit, March 1908, n. 1. Home Political Progs Deposit, March 1909, n. 1. Sedition cases—HFM (B) No. 56.

[50] *Bande Mataram*, 25 July 1907.

[51] Upadhyay's statement reads—"I do not want to take any part in this trial, because I do not believe that in carrying out my humble share of the Good-appointed mission of swaraj I am in my way accountable to the alien people who happen to rule over us, and whose interest is and must necessarily be in the way of our true national development." *Ibid*, 24 September 1907.

[52] In connection with the *Nabasakti* trial of January 1908 the chief secretary of the Bengal government (E. A. Gait) "again" drew the attention of the home department of the government of India to this anomaly. "The punishment of underlings affords no real check on the propagation of sedition by their employers, who at present not only enjoy absolute immunity, but benefit by the increased circulation of their papers which a prosecution naturally brings." No. 194 P of 13

effectively shackled in June 1908 by the Newspapers (Incitement to Offences) Act (VII of 1908) enabling the summary attachment of presses. By the end of the year, the *Bande Mataram*, the *Sandhya* and the *Yugantar* were all extinct, and the *Nabasakti* and the *New India* had also collapsed. Aurobindo after his release started two weeklies—the *Dharma* in Bengali and the *Karmayogin* in English—which were described in an official report as "relics of the old *Yugantar*".[53] With their collapse following Aurobindo's flight to Pondicherry in early 1910, the legal extremist press in Bengal (as distinct from underground publications of leaflets and brochures) was almost dead. Virtually the lone survivor of a sort was the *Nayak*, edited by the hard-hitting but somewhat mercurial and unreliable Panchkori Bandopadhyay.[54]

If newspapers represented the most important vehicle for day-to-day nationalist agitation and propaganda, periodicals also made a vital contribution by providing a forum for debates on more fundamental and permanent issues concerning political and social ideals, methods, and ideological conflicts. Many of these discussions appear intellectually

January 1908—Home Public/Political Progs A, February 1908, n. 98-101.

53 *Annual Report on Indian Papers*, Volume IV, p. 163.

54 Cf. *Ibid*, pp. 160, 260 for the *Nayak's* bid to take up the mantle of the *Sandhya*. Panchkori Bandopadhyay had shown remarkable adaptability in serving successively the *Bangabasi* (and the evening daily *Telegraph* associated with it), the *Basumati*, the *Rangalay*, the *Sandhya* and the *Daily Hitavadi* before taking up the *Nayak*, and many, perhaps not unnaturally, accused him of being totally mercenary and lacking in principle (*Sahitya-sadhak-charitmala*, Volume VII, No. 82, pp. 49-55). I am afraid that it is also just possible that he was a police informer. The dossiers of the nine deportees of December 1908 all contain a typewritten report entitled *History of the Bomb Affair* written by one 'L', who is described as having been once the "editor of the evening paper—*The Telegraph*" (Home Political Progs Deposit, November 1909, n. 1-9). 'L' also reported on the Hooghly provincial conference of September 1909; commenting on this report the director of criminal intelligence C. J. Stevenson-Moore stated that 'L' had his "literary idiosyncrasies" and "private enmities", but was otherwise quite reliable. (Home Political Progs B, November 1909, n. 103-104).

stimulating and relevant for us even today, and they are indispensable for the proper understanding of the underlying trends within the swadeshi age.[55]

Of the English-language monthlies, the most important from the political point of view were Satischandra Mukherji's *Dawn* (1897-1913); the *Indian World* (1905-12) edited by Prithwischandra Ray; and from 1907—the superbly edited *Modern Review* of Ramananda Chattopadhyay, which had attained a circulation of 2250 by 1909.[56] The vernacular monthlies included the *Bangadarshan* and *Bhandar* (both edited for part of our period by Rabindranath); the *Bharati* conducted by Sarala Debi and after 1907 by her mother Swarnakumari; the *Prabasi* of Ramananda Chattopadhyay; the *Nabya-Bharat* of Debiprasanna Roychaudhuri; Sureshchandra Samajpati's *Sahitya*; the *Swadeshi* (devoted to industrial themes) edited by Jogindranath Chattopadhyay; and the *Suprabhat* started in 1907 by Kumudini Mitra (daughter of Krishnakumar). In 1909 the most widely-circulated of these journals were the *Prabasi* (3100) and the *Nabya-Bharat* (2500).[57]

Perhaps the most interesting in some ways was the *Bhandar* (1905-07), which regularly invited comments on topical questions posed by it from its readers. The problems raised included ways and means of attaining mass contact (Baisakh 1312); Hindu-Muslim relations (Asar 1312, Asar 1313, Baisakh 1314); methods of fighting the Carlyle Circular (Kartik 1312); what should be done with the national fund (Kartik 1312); suggestions for reform of the Congress and the provincial conference (Paus 1312, Baisakh and Kartik 1313); resignation from honorary posts (Jaistha 1313); the fitness of India for swaraj (Phalgun 1313); and the virtues and defects of the caste system (Sravana-Bhadra 1313). The participants in such discussions included many of the leading political and intellectual figures in Bengal. It is interesting that these monthlies

[55] For a detailed analysis of some of these debates, cf. above, Chapter II. "Trends in the Swadeshi Movement".
[56] *Annual Report on Indian Papers*, Volume IV, p. 149.
[57] *Ibid.*

were mostly edited by Brahmos.[58] The official survey of the press noted in 1909 that "the influence of these publications, though not far-reaching, is yet more lasting than that of the newspapers"—and the more important articles were often re-printed in the form of pamphlets.[59]

As in any modern political movement, pamphlets were brought out in large numbers during the swadeshi age. I have been able to trace about sixty of these, published between 1904 and 1910; and there were many more, as indicated by the Bengal Library Catalogue of printed books for the relevant years. They fall into several distinct groups, and a brief survey of the different types provides a good indicator of the changing forms and growing complexities of the swadeshi movement.

The first group comprises pamphlets like *An Open Letter to Lord Curzon* by One of the People (Dacca, April 1904);[60] Prithwischandra Ray's *The Case Against the Break-up of Bengal* (20 September 1905); P. Mukerji's *All about Partition* (30 September 1905); and two anonymous publications of 1906—*The Partition Riddle* and *The Partition Agitation Explained*.[61] These are concerned almost exclusively with amassing logical arguments against the partition scheme, either directly, or (as with Ray and Mukerji) through extracts from petitions, speeches and newspaper articles. They are of the nature of lawyer's briefs, directed no doubt mainly to convincing public and parliamentary opinion in England. The boycott is hardly mentioned at all even in the later pamphlets, and—apart from the suggestions for a governor-and-

[58] Of the eight vernacular monthlies I have mentioned, all except the *Sahitya* and the *Swadeshi* were edited by Brahmos. *The Annual Report of Indian Papers for 1909* states that "Brahmo influence is predominant" over monthlies—*Ibid*, p. 151.

[59] *Ibid*, p. 152.

[60] This pamphlet is preserved in the Home Public Progs Deposit, April 1904, n. 39.

[61] The catalogue of printed books attribute both these publications to Chandranath Basu. *The Partition Agitation Explained* is dated 12 January 1906, and *The Partition Riddle*, 28 March 1906.

council as an alternative to partition—few other political demands are raised by their authors. In the same period, however, deeper issues are discussed in one or two other pamphlets —written, perhaps significantly, in the vernacular. Thus Rabindranath's Swadesi-Samaj call is analysed critically in Prithwischandra Ray's *Swadeshi samaj—byadhi o chikitsa* (the Disease and the Cure) dated 1904. Pramathanath Raychaudhuri's *Katha banam kaj* (Words versus Works) published in September 1905 is a similar defence of the old style of politics against Tagore's criticism.[62]

From about the autumn of 1905 onwards, the new stage in the national movement brought about by the adoption of the boycott began to leave its impress upon the content and the form of the pamphlets. As in the previous period, some of the pamphlets confine themselves mainly to a description of the course of the movement—but the reality which they reflect is itself of a more complex and altogether more exciting kind. *Banger-angacched* (the Mutilation of Bengal), brought out some time in the second half of 1905 from Krishnakumar Mitra's Samya Press, repeats the old arguments against the partition, still considers it worthwhile to appeal for funds for a campaign in England—but at the same time chalks out the new programme of action in its concluding section calling for boycott of foreign goods, honorary posts, and official receptions and the observance of mourning by all Bengalis. The *Shikshar andolan* (Educational Movement)—a reprint from the *Bhandar* of Agrahayan 1312 (November-December 1905)—gives a detailed chronological account of the first stages of the national education movement. *The Swadeshi Cases* (October 1906) has a selfexplanatory title. The *Lanchchiter samman* (Honour to the Humiliated) of June 1906 by Jogendranath Bandopadhyay (probably a pen-name of Kaliprasanna Kavyabisharod[63]) describes the meetings held in

[62] Both of these essays were originally published in the *Prabasi* (Sravana 1311, Aswin 1312) and soon afterwards reprinted as pamphlets.

[63] The identification is made by Brojendranath Bandopadhyay, *Sahitya-sadhak-charitmala*, Volume VI, No. 68, p. 83.

February 1906 to honour the victims of police repression, and the break-up of the Barisal conference. The Barisal conference is the theme also of Priyanath Guha's *Yojna-Bhanga* (Break-up of a Solemn Celebration) published in September 1907. Dinanath Dutta's *Bangiya yubaker upasthit abastha o kartabya* (The Situation and the Duties of Present-day Bengali Youth) of Kartik 1313 (October 1906) is a rather pedestrian appeal to the youth of Bengal for courage and patriotic selfsacrifice. *A Few Observations on the Present Situation* by Yatindranath Chaudhuri represents the moderate reactions to the Jamalpur riots. Debkumar Raychaudhuri's *Byadhi o pratikar* (The Illness and the Remedy) published about a year before had tried to probe deeper into the communal problem; by its emphasis upon the absolute necessity for Hindu-Muslim unity it anticipated some of Rabindranath's writings of the post-1907 period. Tagore in fact was to warmly praise this pamphlet in the autumn of 1907.[64]

The boycott had been adopted as a protest against the partition; but in justifying and popularising the new agitational form, it was natural and even inevitable to bring in the much broader theme of the growing poverty of India caused by industrial devastation and the drain of wealth. The basic arguments had been worked out during the preceding generation by a galaxy of moderate economists—Digby, Naoroji, Ranade, G. V. Joshi and Rameshchandra Dutt. The work of popularisation had been taken in hand by Sakharam Ganesh Deuskar, whose *Desher katha* (Story of the Country) was first published in 1904; it has gone through four editions (with some revisions being made in the later ones in a radical direction) totalling 10,000 copies by 1907.[65] A summary of certain chapters of this fairly big work was circulated as a pamphlet named *Krishaker sarbanash* (Ruin of the Peasantry), and was later banned by the government.[66] *Bharate anna-*

[64] *Prabasi*, Aswin 1314 (1907).

[65] Preface to fourth Edition (1314/1907).

[66] Short Notes on Some Proscribed Books and List of Prohibited Dramas—HFM (B), No. 50.

kashta (Scarcity in India)—a sixteen-page pamphlet written by the Budge Budge labour agitator Surjyakumar Ghoshal In February 1908[67]—tackled the problem of rising prices. The nationalists attributed this to excessive export of foodgrains and the spread of jute cultivation, by means of which Indians were satisfying their craving for foreign luxuries—and only boycott could break this vicious circle. Gispati Raychaudhuri Kabyatirtha's *Bideshi bahishkar o swadeshi mahatmya* (Expulsion of the Foreign and the Virtues of the Indigenous) of November 1907 likewise portrayed boycott as the panacea for industrial devastation, high prices and famine; it combined this economic analysis with an appeal to abjure foreign goods on the ground also of the alleged impurities they contained. But perhaps the most interesting of all these pamphlets is the one by Charuchandra Basu Majumdar entitled *Bartaman samashya o swadeshi andolan* (Present-day Problems and the Swadeshi Movement), published on 1 November 1905. The conventional themes—the economic justification for the boycott, the moderate political goal of a reunited Bengal under a governor-and-council—are here expounded in colloquial Bengali (with even an occasional dash of Midnapuri dialect), and the form adopted is that of a dialogue between Ramesh Babu, a swadeshi enthusiast, and Gopi Ghosh (a peasant). The peasant, by the way, at one stage rather timidly suggests that perhaps one way of reducing the poverty of the poor would be to redistribute among them the wealth of the rich. The swadeshi leader promptly informs him that no one is really rich in India; rather, what everyone should do is to unite and cut down the annual expenditure of Rs 38 crores on foreign goods, which, it is argued, would automatically increase the average income of Indians by Rs 5. An interesting expression indeed of usually-unstated class assumptions!

In the literature of the swadeshi movement, the economic ruin caused by foreign exploitation was very often coun-

[67] The date given on the title page is 1314 (1907-8). The Bengal Library Catalogue date is 27 February 1908.

terposed to a story of pre-British bliss, of a land flowing with milk and honey which Bengal had once been and might become again. This was the dream of 'Golden Bengal' which haunted the minds of so many in that age, and found expression in poetry and song as well as in more ephemeral tracts for the times. A historian of some distinction, Nikhilnath Roy,[68] published his *Sonar Bangla* (Golden Bengal) in July 1906, expounding this theme of past glory giving place to present degradation through the machination of foreign traders and rulers; the remedy lay of course in boycott and swadeshi. Umakanta Hazari's *Banga-jagaran o swadesher nana-katha* (Awakening of Bengal and Swadeshi Miscellany) of April 1907 expresses similar views, and also gives a general description (extremely careless as regards chronology, by the way, the partition being dated 30 October!) of the course of the movement. It rather naively states that "no one will praise us if we do not praise ourselves".[69]

On the eve of Partition Day, 16 October 1905, the same theme had found much nobler and more memorable expression in Ramendrasundar Trivedi's famous *Bangalakshmir brata-katha* (A Vow for Bengali Women).[70] In colloquial Bengali, simple yet dignified, Ramendrasundar made in this pamphlet a notable attempt to translate the swadeshi message into terms which could be easily understood by unsophisticated and tradition-steeped village women. The goddess of fortune had been on the point leaving Bengal once before, due to the fratricidal strife of Hindu and Muslim; Husain Shah and Akbar had made her stay through their tolerant policies. Now once again she had become restless, as the British were dividing Bengal, cutting off brother from brother, Hindus in the west from Muslims in the east. But

[68] Nikhilnath revived Akshoykumar Maitra's historical journal *Aitihasik Chitra* in 1904-5 and again between 1907 and 1914; he was the author of a history of Murshidabad (1902) and a book on Pratapaditya (1906). *Sahitya-sadhak-charitmala*, Volume VI, No. 71.

[69] Umakanta Hazari, p. 46.

[70] The full text of this pamphlet is given in *Sahitya-sadhak-charitmala*, Volume VI, No. 70, pp. 73-81.

the womenfolk of Bengal could make her stay, through the annual rakhi-bandhan and arandhan rites,[71] and above all by taking the brata (sacred vow) of abstention from foreign goods. And then Lakshmi would reign for ever over the fields and homes of golden Bengal. The evident sincerity of the plea for Hindu-Muslim unity, the equally obvious fact that the entire pamphlet is steeped in Hindu mythology, tradition and folk custom—the dichotomy here epitomises the tragedy of the swadeshi age.

With an increasing number, the historical argument became the prologue for a politics much more militant than boycott; unfortunately, the Hindu tone kept pace with deepening radicalism. Sakharam Ganesh Deuskar's pamphlet *Shivaji*, written on the occasion of the 1906 Calcutta festival and circulated widely in Mymensingh by the Suhrid Samiti, innocently declares that the "virtues of Shivaji will undoubtedly attract worship from the hearts of Muhammadans". The author ends, however, with the cheerful advice, put in the mouth of Ramdas, to "establish religion by the strength of the arm... Treat the iconoclasts like dogs..."[72] The pamphlet entitled *Aryabhumi* which the police found circulating in Faridpur district in October 1907 gives an idyllic picture of the traditional village community; it calls on Bengalis, now dying "inch by an inch", to "die smilingly for... wives, sons, parents, selfrespect and manliness". There are frequent references to the outrages of Muslims at Jamalpur.[73]

As the *Rowlatt Report* pointed out, the integration of Hindu religiosity with revolutionary politics had been given its classic form already by 1905, in Aurobindo's pamphlet *Bhowani mandir* with its cult of Shakti and rather vague

[71] For an account of these rites, see below.

[72] A translation of this pamphlet is given in the annexure to the Second Supplementary Report on Samitis in the Dacca Division. Home Political Progs Deposit, October 1909, n. 1.

[73] A translation of this *Aryabhumi* pamphlet is enclosed in the Fortnightly Report from the Government of Eastern Bengal and Assam for the first half of October 1907. Home Public Progs A, November 1907, n. 18.

talk of a 'new order of Karmayogins".[74] The *Bhowani mandir* was no doubt important in the training of revolutionary elite-groups; but more relevant to our present theme of popularisation of militant ideas are the illegal leaflets which prominent persons and bar libraries started receiving by post from the end of July 1905.[75] The first of these, *Raja ke?* (Who Is Our King?) is remarkable and indeed unique in its attack on the servility of the zamindars—"Now we have been able to realise that we are simply cultivators but they are ghulams (slaves)... Now these feringhis, sons of devils, divide this golden Bengal and zamindars accept it with bowed heads." The pamphlet emphasises that "we Hindus and Muhamadans jointly worship the feet of the mother native country" and warns against divide-and-rule schemes; it combines the appeal for boycott with the call—"We must not pay enhanced rents."[76] The antilandlord note is absent from *Sonar bangla* (Golden Bengal), which was being circulated at about the same time; but this leaflet too calls for Hindu-Muslim unity and is inspired by the vision of something like a revolt of the entire people against foreign rule.[77] There seems to have been a whole series of these *Sonar bangla* leaflets,[78] but their content changed with time.

[74] *Sedition Committee* (*Rowlatt*) *Report* (1918), pp. 17, 67. Quotations from and Discussion on *Bhowani mandir*—HFM (B), No. 53. The text of the *Bhowani mandir* was reprinted in *Sri Aurobindo Mandir Annual*, 1956.

[75] Report on the Agitation Against the Partition of Bengal (letter from government of Bengal No. 205 P, 25 January 1906) paras 24-25; Home Public Progs A, June 1906, n. 175. I discuss the question of authorship in Chapter IX below; most probably the Barindrakumar Ghosh-Bhupendranath Dutta group was responsible.

[76] *Ibid*, Enclosure B. The translation of this leaflet is given also in *Amrita Bazar Patrika* 16 September 1905, which reprinted it from the *Pioneer*. The virulantly anti-Indian Allahabad Journal frequently published such incendiary materials in order to discredit the whole movement.

[77] *Ibid*. Report on the Agitation Against the Partition of Bengal, (25 January 1906) Enclosure G.

[78] Bhupendranath Dutta, *Bharater dwitiya swadhinata-sangram* (3rd ed., 1949) p. 146.

Thus during the trial of the editor of the *Punjabee* one such leaflet—reproduced in the first number of Brahmabandhab Upadhyay's weekly *Swaraj* (26 Phalgun 1313—March 1907) —urged Indians to organise secret societies to fight for the freedom of the country. Yet another one that I have been able to trace—posted from Mymensingh to Aswinicoomar Banerji on 20 April 1907—also frankly calls for secret societies, arms collection, and training, and in general the imitation of the 'Russian' example. But this militancy is accompanied by ominous references to the Comilla disturbances in the very first paragraph—there, we are told, the 'Bengali' had at last learnt the strength of his own arms. The vision of Hindu-Muslim unity and an anti-foreign mass upsurge has given place to calls for terroristic elite-action by Hindu bhadralok youth.[79]

In November 1906, Jogendranath Sarkar's *Jatiya samashya* (The National Problem) had stated categorically that mere economic boycott or swadeshi or national education would achieve nothing; what was needed was a struggle for political independence, and for this selfsacrifice and the "organisation of national strength" was necessary.[80] The terrorist tone becomes clearer from the middle of 1907 onwards. *Mukti kon pathe* (Which Way Freedom)—a series of four pamphlets edited and published by Abinash Bhattacharyya during 1907-8—brought together in a handy form some of the more significant *Yugantar* articles. *Bartaman rananiti* (Art of War Today) expounded the techniques of guerilla warfare—"a new literary departure", the *Bande Mataram* of 13 October 1907 described it to be, pointing out (probably with tongue in cheek) that the work was in Indian conditions no more than an academic exercise. Kiranchandra

[79] *Private Papers of Aswinicoomar Banerji.*

[80] Jogendranath Sarkar, *Jatiya samashya*, p. 18. Published by the Chhatra Bhandar, printed at the Sadhana Printing Works, 41 Champatala 1st Lane, 9 November 1906. Chhatra Bhandar was the financial 'front' organisation of the revolutionary party; the press is that of the *Yugantar* weekly.

Mukhopadhyay's *Pantha* (The Way) of May 1908 appealed in its preamble to those "who look forward to embracing death as nectar. . ." It includes a poem :—

Your words, O Rudra, today
Suddenly strike mine ears,. . .
The red flag shall I hoist today,
In the rays of the newly-risen sun. . .
Blood will run in flowing streams
And I shall ply my boat on it.
Oh destruction, you are come, with cares and love
Let me welcome thee!

The pamphlet also contains a vivid and moving account of the life of these young revolutionaries— ". . .some of us have sat up all night to write articles for the *Yugantar*;. . . some have walked from door to door with books and papers for fear of the police; some have mustered courage to go to jail. . .some have formed samitis. . ."[81] We have indeed come a long way from the *Open Letter to Curzon* of four years before.

As the laws gagging the press became tighter, radical pamphlets had to be either printed illicitly or smuggled in from abroad. The texts of some of the latter category survive today in the home department archives. They are distinguished by greater theoretical clarity and an awareness of the international context and significance of the Indian freedom struggle; and they also reveal the beginning of a process of emancipation from the religiosity which had marked early revolutionary literature in Bengal and Maharashtra.[82]

Newspapers, periodicals and pamphlets could reach after all only the literate minority. The platform had potentially much greater appeal, though this was limited for a long time

[81] Prosecution of the author and printer of a seditious Bengali book called *Pantha* under section 124A, Indian Penal Code. Home Political Progs A, March 1909, n. 89-94.

[82] Cf. particularly *Choose, Oh Indian Princes, Bande Mataram* (with a photograph of Madanlal Dhingra on frontispiece), and *Oh Martyrs*—Home Political Progs Deposit, April 1911, n. 7. For details, see Chapter IX.

by the unfortunate habit Indians had developed of public speaking in English. From the middle of the nineteenth century onwards, Bengal had produced a considerable number of great orators—Ramgopal Ghosh, Keshabchandra Sen, Anandamohan Bose, Lalmohan Ghosh, Surendranath Banerji —but the fame of all of them rested mainly on their English speeches. Even at the Bengali provincial conferences the Tagores had to fight a hard battle in 1897 before the mother-tongue could obtain a hearing;[83] and not before 1908 was the presidential address itself delivered (by Rabindranath) in Bengali.

The swadeshi movement influenced public oratory in three ways. The number and size of meetings vastly increased; there was an obvious change in content in the direction of a militancy undreamt of before; and a shift began—gradual and by no means complete—towards the use of the language of the people.

During the first wave of the movement against the partition in the winter of 1903-4, the *Sanjibani* reported 71 meetings between 5 and 13 January—41 of them from Mymensingh (where the agitation at this time was strongest, thanks partly to the very active role of Maharaja Surjyakanta Acharyya Chaudhuri).[84] A memorial to the secretary of state in July 1905 recalled that "no less than 500 protest meetings were held in East Bengal alone within a period of two months" of the publication of the Risley letter.[85] Such records were

[83] At the Natore conference, the compromise eventually made was that Rabindranath made a running translation of the English speeches. It may be admitted that W. C. Bonnerji had a point—"Rabi Babu, your Bengali was wonderful, but do you think that your chashas and bhushas understood your mellifluous language better than our English?" (Rathindranath Tagore, *On the Edges of Time*, 1958, p. 20). But then chashas and bhushas were nowhere in the picture at provincial conferences in 1897 or for long long afterwards.

[84] *Sanjibani*, 14 January 1904—RNP(B) for week ending 23 January 1904.

[85] East Bengal Memorial to Secretary of State-in-Council, July 1905. Prithwischandra Ray, *The Case Against the Break-up of Bengal* (September 1905), p. 36 (Appendix F).

broken many times over as the movement really got into its stride after July 1905. At the Town Hall rally of 22 September 1905, Surendranath stated that 167 meetings had been held throughout Bengal during the preceding fortnight; he estimated the total attendance at 650,000.[86] On 3 March 1906, as an answer to Morley's assertion in parliament that the movement was dying down, 17 meetings were held in Calcutta on a single day—the *Bengalee* publishing beforehand a list of fifty-seven speakers.[87] The Barisal conference incidents led to another wave of angry protest meetings—142 throughout India during the second half of April 1906, we are told, with a total attendance of half a million.[88] The attendance figures which the nationalist papers gave were no doubt very often exaggerated, and it may be a useful check to remember that there were no loud-speakers, and that the Calcutta meetings were generally held at College Square and the parks of the northern part of the city—not yet on the maidan. Still there is no reason to doubt that very many more were attending political meetings than had ever done so before, and it is difficult not to be impressed by the reports of rallies in small towns and even villages which are obscure today and must have been even more so sixty years ago.

The tempo of the movement was kept up by frequent tours of the districts by Calcutta leaders, and an element of competition crept in as the Surendranath-Bepinchandra rivalry deepened. Surendranath—often accompanied by Kaliprasanna Kabyabisharod, Jogeshchandra Chaudhuri and Krishnakumar Mitra—was certainly the most prominent orator of the earlier phases of the boycott movement. Thus, to give a few examples, we hear of Surendranath visiting Dacca on 26 August and Khulna on 25 September 1905;[89] Tippera in

[86] *Bengalee*, 23 September 1905.
[87] *Ibid*, 3-4 March 1906. Factional spirit made the *Bengalee* relegate Bepinchandra Pal to the very last place in this list of speakers.
[88] *Ibid*, 1 May 1906.
[89] *Ibid*, 1 October 1905. Report on the Agitation Against the Partition of Bengal (25 January 1906) para 57—Home Public Progs A, June 1906, n. 175.

January and Pabna in March 1906;[90] attending the first anniversary meeting of the Barisal Swadesh Bandhab Samiti on 11 August 1906;[91] touring Bhagalpur in September 1906;[92] and addressing meetings at Serajgunj in February 1907.[93] But Bepinchandra Pal was even more active in the period from the Barisal conference to May 1907. Accompanied by Subodhchandra Mullick and Aurobindo, he visited Dacca, Kishoregunj, Mymensingh, Chandpur, Brahmanbaria and Comilla in course of the month following the break-up of the conference;[94] was back in East Bengal again in August and September 1906;[95] visited Purulia in December 1906;[96] delivered strongly-worded speeches urging extended boycott (he used the term bahiskaran i.e. total expulsion) at Rangpur, Dinajpur, Habigunj, Comilla, Barisal and other places in East Bengal between January and March 1907;[97] and had then gone out on a famous tour spreading the message of swaraj and passive resistance down the coast of India up to Madras

[90] D.O. No. 145 Public of 12 July 1906 from H.H. Risley to Sir A. Godley—Home Public Progs A, July 1906, n. 124.

[91] Abstract of Reports from Eastern Bengal and Assam regarding the agitation during the first half of August 1906—Home Public Progs B, October 1906, n. 13.

[92] Abstract of Reports from Bengal...during second half of September 1906—Home Public Progs A, December 1906, n. 144-48.

[93] Abstract of Reports from Eastern Bengal and Assam...during second half of February 1907—Home Public Progs A, April 1907, n. 207-10.

[94] *Bengalee*, 20 April, 25 April, 1 May, 9 May, 15 May and 16 May 1906.

[95] Abstract of Reports from Eastern Bengal and Assam...during second half of August 1906—Home Public Progs B, October 1906, n. 13. Fortnightly Report from Government of Eastern Bengal and Assam No. 225 B.M. 6/8 October 1906—Home Public Progs A, December 1906, n. 144-48.

[96] Abstract of Reports from Bengal...during first half of December 1906—Home Public Progs A, February 1907, n. 265.

[97] Abstract of Reports from Eastern Bengal and Assam...during second half of January and first and second half of February 1907; Fortnightly Report from Eastern Bengal and Assam, No. 474 T, 1 April 1907—Home Public Progs A, April 1907, n. 207-10.

till the news of the deportation of Lajpat made him change his plans.[98] It was Pal above all who broadcast the new extremist creed before district audiences, extending the split among Calcutta leaders down to the mufassil level.[99]

A number of Muslim swadeshi orators were also very prominent during 1906-7—men like Liakat Husain, Din Mahomed, Abdul Gafur, Abul Husain and several others.[100] And while the Calcutta leaders certainly worked very hard—thus in the three years 1905-8, Krishnakumar Mitra (a man well over fifty) addressed thirty-nine meetings, and Sachindraprasad Bose, fifty-five[101]—it would be quite incorrect to depict the movement in the districts as being dependent entirely on city orators. The more active samitis often engaged their own local agitators, sometimes on a paid basis. Thus the Barisal Swadesh Bandhab Samiti during the first year of its existence organised 25 big rallies and 50 street-lectures in Barisal town; it employed several permanent swadeshi preachers for the countryside, and claimed that 12 meetings on an average had been held during the year in each village having a branch of the samiti (there being about 300 such branches, of which 16 had sent reports).[102]

Patriotic considerations and the demands of mass audiences combined to bring about a shift to the vernacular, but this was a slow, incomplete and often rather painful change from the point of view of the English-educated intelligentsia lead-

[98] For an account of Bepinchandra's activities during these years, see also Haridas and Uma Mukherji, *Bepin Pal and India's Struggle for Swaraj* (1958).

[99] Thus the police comment on Pal's tour of August 1906 reads—"The result of Bepin Babu's visit to Comilla has been to divide Bengali opinion at that place." Abstract of Reports from Eastern Bengal and Assam...during second half of August 1906—Home Public Progs B, October 1906, n. 13.

[100] For Muslim participation in the swadeshi movement, see below, Chapter VIII.

[101] Home Political Progs Deposit, November 1909, n. 2 and 7 (Dossiers of S. P. Bose and K. K. Mitra).

[102] Annual Report of Swadesh Bandhab Samiti—*Bengalee*, 14 September 1906.

ing the movement, moderate and extremist alike.[103] A mufassil weekly—the *Khulnavasi* of 16 September 1905—thought it necessary to remind the leaders that for "educating the masses...the vernacular should be encouraged in public speaking".[104] Meetings where all the speeches were in Bengali were still rare enough in 1905 for the fact to be often specially reported in newspapers.[105] Surendranath always remained essentially an English orator; even at highly emotional moments like the reception accorded to him at Sealdah station on his return from the Barisal conference, he is reported to have spoken first in English, followed by "a few minutes" in Bengali.[106] Aurobindo could speak only in English, but of course he had some justification—and he was always very apologetic about it.[107] But Bepinchandra Pal created a sensation by his powerful speeches in Bengali;[108] his thunderous style no doubt swayed vast audiences even if it was to irritate the sensitive youth Jawaharlal later on.[109] And of course the vernacular becomes predominant as we go down the scale of

[103] The importance of English in the personal life of the nationalist elite is indicated by the fact that virtually all the letters preserved in the Private Papers of Aswinicoomar Banerji are in English—and the correspondents include Surendranath, Motilal Ghosh, Asutosh Chaudhuri, P. Mitter, Krishnakumar, Aswinikumar Dutta, Bepinchandra Pal and Aurobindo. The only exceptions are Surendranath Tagore and Sarala Debi—one is reminded of the Maharshi's stern insistence on the mother-tongue within his family.

[104] RNP(B) for week ending 23 September 1905.

[105] Thus "a special feature" of a Jalpaiguri meeting on 23 August 1905 was that the proceedings were throughout in the vernacular (*Bengalee*, 1 September 1905). At the Sabitri Library meeting of 27 September 1905, "the proceedings were all conducted in Bengali"—and we are not surprised to learn that Rabindranath was in the chair (*Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 3 October 1905).

[106] *Bengalee*, 19 April 1906.

[107] Aurobindo apologised for speaking in English at Baruipur (12 April 1908) and again at Kumartuli (August 1909). Sri Aurobindo, *Speeches* (1922, 1948), pp. 42, 154.

[108] Jadugopal Mukhopadhyay recalls the electrifying effect of Pal's Bengali speeches—*Biplabi jivaner smriti* (1956), pp. 223-24.

[109] Jawaharlal Nehru, *An Autobiography* (1936), p. 22.

leaders, till we come to the Barisal village agitator who could obviously speak or be understood in nothing else.

In May 1907, we find the government of Eastern Bengal and Assam suggesting the prosecution of Bepinchandra Pal for his extremist speeches in East Bengal, as well as action against six Muslim swadeshi agitators.[110] Though these proposals were ultimately dropped, the Regulation of Meetings Ordinance of 11 May 1907 banned meetings without official permission in wide areas of East Bengal and Punjab for six months.[111] On 1 November 1907 the ordinance was replaced by the Seditious Meetings Act, which was immediately applied to Bakargunj—and a Swadesh Bandhab Samiti report admitted that these restrictions had dealt a severe blow to the movement: "Those who sometimes doubt about the necessity of these speeches will now understand what an amount of inconvenience has been caused by the stoppage of meetings."[112] In Calcutta, sedition cases were launched against Aswinicoomar Banerji and Liakat Husain in September 1907 for certain speeches made by them.[113] After the clashes of October 1907, meetings at 14 specified public places within the city were banned for some three months. To enable easy police identification of speakers and participants, a rather peculiar magisterial order of 22 August 1908 prescribed that meetings had to end half an hour before sunset; this order was renewed several times down to April.[114]

[110] Home Public Progs A, June 1907, n. 117-18.

[111] The notified areas in East Bengal were: Dacca, Mymensingh, Faridpur, Bakargunj, Pabna, Rangpur, Tippera districts; the Habigunj subdivision of Sylhet and the Sadar thana of Noakhali. Papers connected with the Seditious Meetings Act—Home Political Progs Deposit, April 1911, n. 7.

[112] History of the Second Year of the Swadeshi Movement (22 Sravana 1313-14). This is a translation of a document seized by the police at Barisal and preserved in the Supplementary Report on Samitis in the Bakargunj District—Home political Progs Deposit, July 1909, n. 13.

[113] Home Political Progs A, August 1908, n. 23-29.

[114] Home Political Progs Deposit, April 1911, n. 7.

It has to be admitted that the Calcutta orators proved rather easy to intimidate. In December 1908, no senior leader could be found to preside over a meeting to protest against the deportations till the elderly Brahmo Sibnath Sastri stepped into the breach;[115] and Ambicacharan Majumdar admitted at the Bengal provincial conference of September 1910 that "during the last year there were no political meetings held either in the new or in the old province".[116]

II. Evolution of New Techniques

Newspapers, periodicals, pamphlets, public meetings—all these were forms of mass communication taken from the West, useful and even indispensable, but felt increasingly to be not quite sufficient or suited to the new age. Rabindranath in his famous *Swadeshi samaj* address (July 1904) had combined the central plea for selfreliance with a host of concrete suggestions regarding ways of bringing the gulf between the English-educated elite and the masses. Instead of European-style conferences, he wanted the bhadralok to take an interest in and transform the age-old fairs or melas of the common people. At these melas, exhibitions of swadeshi goods could be organised, and patriotic sentiments broadcasted through jatras (the traditional folk drama-form), songs and talks illustrated with magic-lantern slides. Side by side with this appeal to the imagination should go on the unostentatious, difficult, yet indispensable work of rejuvenating village life through organised selfhelp. In the mind of the Tagore of 1904, this entire scheme was associated with a revival of the traditional Hindu samaj; orthodox religion would provide the way for ending the alienation of the elite.[117] So great was the popular

[115] Sukumar Mitra, "Sri Aurobindo Ackroyd Ghosh", *Mashik Basumati*, Magh 1358 (1592).

[116] Letter from the Government of Bengal to the Government of India (Home) No. 3231 PD. 8 October 1910—Home Political Progs B, October 1910, n. 76.

[117] Rabindranath, *Swadeshi samaj* (Viswabharati edition, 1962) pp. 12-15, 20.

interest, that Rabindranath had to deliver the same address twice, the second time (at the Curzon Theatre) to an audience of 1200.[118]

The debate on new techniques was resumed in the pages of the first number of Tagore's monthly *Bhandar* (Baisakh 1312—April-May 1905). Surendranath posed the problem—"how popular interest could be maintained in present-day public endeavours"—and replies came from Nagendranath Ghosh, Hirendranath Dutt, Asutosh Chaudhuri, Jogeshchandra Chaudhuri, Ramendrasundar Trivedi, Prithwischandra Ray and Bepinchandra Pal. Pal pointed out that the problem was really to establish—and not just maintain—contact with the people, and suggested a twofold programme which later events made into almost a blue-print for the future. Village life should be rejuvenated through a variety of concrete selfhelp efforts, he suggested, and "patriotism must be converted into a religion, with its own symbols, images, vows and ceremonial".

These ideas, it must be pointed out, were not entirely new. Many of them had been tried out, though on a smaller scale, during the sixties, seventies and early eighties of the past century—that relatively neglected but fascinating generation which had seen the Hindu Mela, the composition of numerous patriotic songs, dramas full of nationalist ideas, swadeshi endeavours and even some talk of boycott (by Bholanath Chandra), secret societies of young men, and peasant rallies organised by the Indian Association. But then there had come a lull, a rather depressing twenty years during which politics had degenerated into mendicant speeches at dull conferences, and popular imagination had come to be swamped by basically apolitical religious revivalism. Bepinchandra Pal—himself, despite Brahmoism, by no means immune from such revivalist influences—made the interesting statement in March 1903 that since the Ilbert Bill days, "politics have been neglected in the interest of abstract religion. And in consequence religious songs have supplanted the old national

[118] *Ibid*, p. 51.

songs."[119] The swadeshi movement revived—of course, on a vastly extended scale—the more imaginative methods of that earlier period, and used them in a concentrated manner in a bid to attain definite political goals—the abrogation of the partition, the enforcement of the boycott, and eventually the liberation of the country.

Constructive work in the villages was taken up in earnest during the swadeshi period by many samitis as well as by individuals like Rabindranath; such efforts will be described in detail in the following section on organisation. The Suhrid Samiti of Mymensingh made considerable use of magic-lantern lectures.[120] Volunteers attended local melas in large numbers, though mainly with the purpose of enforcing the boycott.[121] In the latter half of 1906, the Barisal Swadesh Bandhab Samiti organised famine relief work on a truly impressive scale; it ran 160 centres, and Nivedita later hailed

[119] *New India*, 19 March 1903. Reprinted in Pal, *Swadeshi and Swaraj* (1954), p. 94. The implications of this rather unusual view about the relationship between revivalism and nationalist politics fall outside my present theme. But I have a hunch that there is a strong case for a drastic revision of the commonly-accepted view on the subject, which assumes that Hindu orthodoxy and revivalism were at all times more truly national and patriotic than the contrary tradition, allegedly somewhat "denationalised", inaugurated by the Derozians and later taken up by the Young Brahmos.

[120] Translation of a report of the Suhrid Samiti dated 1 June 1909, covering the years 1307-13 (1900-6)—Home Political Progs Deposit, October 1909, n. 1.

[121] A list of the melas in which volunteers intervened actively during 1907-9 is given in Appendix III of the Report on National Volunteers in Eastern Bengal and Assam up to the end of April 1909, submitted to the government of India on 23 July 1909. These include the Nangalband (April 1907, April 1908) and Mahakati melas (20 May 1907) in Dacca district; Jamalpur mela and Mymensingh rathajatra festival (April 1907, 4 July 1908) in Mymensingh district; Siddheswari, Nursingpur and Kachi melas in Tippera district (April-May 1907); Jhalakati fair in Bakargunj district (29 February 1908); and the Sitakund mela in Chittagong district (7 March 1908, 20 February 1909). Home Political Progs Deposit, August 1909, n. 26.

this work as "the greatest thing ever done in Bengal".[122] In 1902 Parbatisankar Chaudhuri, zamindar of Teota (Rajshahi district) formulated a detailed scheme for village grain-banks (dharma-golas) to fight famine, and organised one such dharmagola at Goalundo.[123] The idea was revived in 1907, and at the initiative of the proprietors of *Bangabasi* an Annarakshini Sabha (Society for Preservation of Grain) was set up at a meeting on 10 March. The office-bearers of this society for the promotion of grain banks included Asutosh Chaudhuri, Panchkori Bandopadhyay, Girishchandra Basu and the *Bangabasi* proprietor Baradaprasad Basu.[124] But the proposal aroused little interest at the Berhampore provincial conference when it was raised by Durgadas Lahiri; a formal resolution was passed without discussion,[125] and the scheme seems to have remained mainly on paper.

Yet serious limitations persisted, and a real breakthrough to the peasant masses was never achieved except perhaps for a short while in one or two East Bengal districts. On his return from a relief mission to Faridpur, Debiprasanna Raychaudhuri in his *Nabya-Bharat* bluntly accused the leaders of being too enamoured of city lights and applause; while people were starving in East Bengal, he declared, one great nationalist leader was having his carriage pulled by students, while others were busy organising a Shivaji Festival which was not only a waste of money but threatened also to embitter Hindu-Muslim relations.[126] It was not surprising, therefore, that—as Debiprasanna pointed out in another

[122] *Bengalee*, 21 October 1906 (Aswinikumar's report on famine relief work). Indicus, *Aswini Kumar Dutta: A Vindication of His Life and Conduct* (1909)—published (and probably written) by Prithwischandra Ray, p. 64.

[123] *Dawn*, August-September 1902. published Parbatisankar's scheme in full—it covered 53 points. The Goalundo grain-bank is mentioned in Surjyakumar Ghoshal, *Bharate annakashta* (1314), p. 12.

[124] *Bengalee*, 12 March 1907. *Swaraj*, 3 Chaitra 1313.

[125] *Swaraj*, 24 Chaitra 1313.

[126] Debiprasanna Raychaudhuri, "Bideshi-barjan o swadeshi-grahan", *Nabya-Bharat*, Asar 1313 (June-July 1906). The reference in the first part of the statement is to Surendranath, who had allowed the students

article some months later—"more than ninety per cent of the lower classes have remained entirely indifferent towards the swadeshi movement".[127] From 1907 onwards, as is well known, Rabindranath was developing this same theme of inadequate mass contact and need for quiet work in the villages, but few heeded his words of warning and advice. The failure was not merely a subjective one, as Debiprasanna and Rabindranath evidently thought it to be. It is true that young men found constructive work in villages dull and far less attractive than radical politics and eventually terrorism. But the deeper failure—and one from which critics like Rabindranath also suffered—was the inability to integrate the nationalist cause with the economic demands and aspirations of the common people; the swadeshi leaders failed, in other words, to develop a real peasant programme. Some swadeshi leaders at this time were actively helping the workers to organise trade unions and strikes. But in the case of the peasants, even Debiprasanna went no further than famine relief and suggestions for rural banks to fight moneylenders,[128] while Rabindranath's vision was the rather utopian one of benevolent zamindars encouraging village self-help efforts.[129]

The second part of Bepinchandra Pal's programme appeared much more attractive to the men of 1905, and it seemed to indicate an easier path by which nationalism could reach the masses. Swadeshi was indeed preached as a kind of religion, and—like all religions, perhaps—the appeal was a two-fold one, to imagination and to fear.[130]

to unhorse his carriage and pull it themselves on his return from the Barisal conference. *Bengalee*, 19 April 1906.

[127] Debiprasanna Raychaudhuri, 'Bande-Mataram mantra, democracy o daridra-samashya", *Nabya-Bharat*, Paus 1313 (December 1906—January 1907).

[128] These suggestions were made in the two articles cited above (f.n. 126, 127).

[129] Presidential Address at Pabna Provincial Conference, February 1908, R.R.X, 518.

[130] I am borrowing these terms from a historian of the Protestant Reformation, T. M. Lindsay.

III. The Appeal to Imagination

At two meetings during the last week of September 1905, Rabindranath put forward his plan for observing rakhi-bandhan on the coming Partition Day, transforming a traditional popular rite into a symbol of the brotherhood and unity of the people of Bengal.[131] The leaders accepted the idea, and from 11 October onwards every issue of the *Bengalee* carried an appeal calling for the exchange of rakhis (wristlets of coloured thread) by all Bengalis on 16 October irrespective of class, caste or creed.[132] Bengal, and particularly Calcutta, witnessed truly memorable scenes of fraternisation on that day, from which Muslim mullas, policemen and even whites were not excluded.[133] From early morning, huge crowds walked barefoot (the traditional sign of mourning) to the Ganga to bathe in its holy waters, which too know no caste. Year after year these rites were kept up, though may be on a diminishing scale—till the partition itself was abrogated. The imagination of India's greatest poet had bestowed on a political movement a beauty which is rare indeed.

Another rite observed every year on Partition Day was arandhan, suggested by Ramendrasundar Trivedi—the call to women not to light the home fires for the day. Women were thus being drawn into the movement, though still on a rather limited scale. The *Sanjibani* of 8 Bhadra 1312 (24 August 1905) notes the beginning of protest meetings of

[131] These were the meetings at Kansaripara on 24 September and Sabitri Library on 27 September, at both of which Rabindranath presided. *Bengalee*, 26 September, 28 September 1905.

[132] The *Sanjibani* made a similar appeal in its issue of 26 Aswin (12 October), but injected a dose of rather unnecessary Brahmo puritanism by its rider that men should bind with rakhis the hands of men only, and women likewise. One is glad to know, however, that the injunction was not perhaps strictly obeyed—see Abanindranath Tagore and Rani Chanda, *Gharoa* (1941), p. 11.

[133] Abanindranath in his delightful reminiscences tells us of Rabindranath's impetuous dash into the Nakhoda Mosque to put rakhis on the mullas there. *Ibid*, pp. 11-12. The best contemporary description is that of the *Sanjibani* (2 Kartik 1312—19 October 1905).

women; 500 watched the laying of the foundation-stone of Federation Hall on 16 October 1905 from the balconies of Brahmo Girls' School;[134] and on the same day Ramendrasundar's *Banga lakshmir brata-katha* was read before a meeting of women in the author's home-village in Murshidabad district.[135] We hear of women smashing their foreign churis (bangles) after listening to an emotional speech by Kaliprasanna Kabyabisharod in Khulna.[136] Bepinchandra Pal addressed ladies' meetings at Habigunj and Bhola in course of his tour of Eastern Bengal in February 1907;[137] and the women of Tangail gave a great reception to Surendranath when he visited this Mymensingh town two months later.[138] To give two more examples, this time from opposite ends of the social scale—a ladies' meeting in honour of Bhupendranath Dutta's mother (after her son's arrest) was organised in August 1907 at the house of the famous physician and swadeshi enthusiast, Dr Nilratan Sircar;[139] and—if a police report is to be trusted—a number of Barisal public women made over their savings to the Swadesh Bandhab Samiti.[140] Yet the limitations remain clear—there are no women leaders (with the possible exception of Sarala Debi); no one as yet dreams of including girls in the samiti or volunteer movement; and the prevalent orthodox ideology of the swadeshi age could hardly have been conducive to the acceptance of full equality of sexes. For all that we had to wait for Gandhiji.

134 *Sanjibani, loc. cit.*

135 *Sahitya-sadhak-charitmala,* Volume VI, No. 70, p. 72.

136 District Surveys (July-August 1906)—Report on the Antipartition and Swadeshi Movement in Bengal (7 September 1906). Home Public Progs B, October 1906, n. 13.

137 Abstract of Reports from Eastern Bengal and Assam...during second half of February 1907. Home Public Progs A, April 1907. n. 207-210.

138 *Swaraj*, 22 Baisakh 1314.

139 *Bande Mataram*, 13 August 1907.

140 Fortnightly Report from Eastern Bengal and Assam for second half of November 1908. Home Political Progs A, January 1909, n. 94.

The swadeshi movement's greatest claim to immortality lies perhaps in the realm of patriotic poetry and song. The Bengal of the 1860s and '70s had produced a good number of these, and many of the characteristic themes had already been developed in them—sorrow at the present plight of India,[141] nostalgia for the allegedly glorious Hindu or Aryan past,[142] occasional references to the destruction of crafts and industries,[143] and visions of Indian unity.[144] Yet the harvest of the swadeshi age still stands unequalled in its abundance.

1905 inspired Rabindranath to compose some of his finest songs, and these inevitably stand in a class by themselves. But there were many other writers—Rajanikanta Sen, Kalipra-sanna Kabyabisharod, Dwijendralal Roy, Satyendranath Dutta, Kartikchandra Dasgupta, Bijoychandra Majumdar, Kaminikumar Bhattacharyya, Mukunda Das, Girindramohini Dasi, Syed Abu Mohammad, Ismail Husain Shirazi—and others whose names today will be known only to the literary ex-

[141] As examples, we may cite Dwijendranath Tagore's "Molina mukha-chandrima bharata tomari" and his cousin Ganendranath's "Lajjay bharata-jasha gaiba ki kore" (both written for the Chaitra or Hindu Mela started in 1867); Hemchandra Bandopadhyay's "Bajo re shinga bajo ei rabe...bharat shudhui ghumay roy" (published in 1870); and Gobindachandra Roy's *Bharat-bilap*—which contains the deeply moving lines:

Paro deepa-shikha nagare nagare
Tumi je timire, tumi she timire.

[142] Cf. for example Satyendranath Tagore's "Mila sabe bharata santan" (composed for the 1868 Hindu Mela), and passages in Hemchandra Bandopadhyay's *Viravahu kabya* (1864)—

Bharater punarbar, she shobha habe ki ar
Ajodhya-hastinapathe hindu jabe basita.

[143] The best-known instance is Monohohan Basu's song "Diner din sabe deen, bharat hoye paradheen" which goes on to bewail India's dependence even in simple things like matches. The song was included in his play *Harischandra* (1875).

[144] Jyotirindranath Tagore's "Chal re chal sabe bharata santan" (1898) and Sarala Debi's "Atita gauraba-bahini mama bani! Gao hindustan" (sung at the Calcutta Congress of 1901) would be two good examples, veering on the swadeshi period itself.

pert, but who too had their brief moment of fame. A number of collections of swadeshi songs were published; one of them, Jogindranath Sarkar's *Bande mataram*, going through three editions in course of the single month of September 1905, with a fourth being published in the following March.[145]

Particularly interesting were the efforts to bring out songs in local dialects, suitable for village audiences; apart from Mukunda Das in Barisal, the Suhrid Samiti of Mymensingh seems to have specialised in this direction, and it published a whole volume entitled *Swadeshi palli-sangit*. In Bankura, the local bhadu folk-songs became a vehicle for swadeshi propaganda.[146] In Barisal Aswinikumar Dutta persuaded the Muslim folk poet Mofizuddin Bayati to compose swadeshi songs in village dialect, utilising the traditional form of the jari-gan.[147] A munsiff posted in Pabna recorded in his private diary on 23 February 1907 that the Bairagis and Vaishnabis of that district had taken to swadeshi songs in place of the

[145] Jogindranath Sarkar (ed.), *Bande mataram* (revised edition by Sudhindranath Sarkar, 1948), p. 6. Cf. also *Bengalee*, 11 March 1960. I give a list of some of these collections of swadeshi songs :

Rajanikanta Pandit, *Swadeshi palli-sangeet* (Mymensingh 1312/1905); Jogendranath Sharma, *Swadesh sangeet* (November 1905) (pseudonym of Kaliprasanna Kabyabisharod); Jogindranath Sarkar, *Bande mataram* (September 1905); Jnanendramohan Sengupta, *Desher gan* (1312/1905); Jogendranath Gupta, *Swadesh gatha* (1313/1906); Hemchandra Sen, *Matrigatha* (1907); Hiralal Sengupta, *Hunkar* (1315/1908); Naliniranjan Sarkar, *Bandana* (1315/1908).

For a very able and comprehensive discussion of swadeshi songs, see Soumendra Gangopadhyay, *Swadeshi andolan o bangla sahitya* (1906), pp. 229-64. Gangopadhyay gives extracts from most of the above collections; he has not used, however, Hemchandra Sen's *Matrigatha* which I have found particularly valuable because most of the 60 songs recorded in it have been completely forgotten today. The *Bande mataram*, in contrast, includes many of the more famous songs of Rabindranath and others.

[146] Pitambar Chandra Chandra, *Swadesh hitaishi bhadu sangeet*, Bankura, 6 October 1906 (Bengal Library Catalogue entry, 1906, Volume IV).

[147] Surendranath Sen, *Aswinikumar Dutta* (n.d.) p. 39. Saratkumar Roy, *Mahatma Aswinikumar* (1926) p. 130.

old religious ones, and were making a lot of money out of these.[148] Thus the pledge of the *Charu Mihir* of Mymensingh in the early days of the movement proved no idle boast —"We shall compose songs on the subject in simple village dialects and teach them to village boys. These songs will be sung in every household in Bengal. They will be the Bengali's national songs..."[149]

Surendranath claims for Kaliprasanna Kabyabisharod the credit for having originated the tradition of opening and closing swadeshi meetings with patriotic songs; no singer himself, he "taught, paid and maintained...two musical experts" for this purpose.[150] Ramakanta Roy seems to have started the practice of propagating the swadeshi cause and raising funds through street-singing in August 1905, and a few months later the great Muslim patriot Liakat Husain organised the Anti-Partition and Swadeshi Procession Party, which (as the Anti-Circular Society secretary reported in November 1906) "now goes out every evening from College Square and sings national songs in the streets of Calcutta".[151] Other volunteer groups adopted these techniques, and songs were obviously even more important in the districts as media for reaching illiterate village audiences. Thus a police report from East Bengal dated 22 January 1907 says—"A new method of appealing to the people is reported from the Tippera district where a band of young men is going about singing patriotic songs which are said to be far more effective than speeches... one song in particular, describing dawn as ushered in by Japan and hoping that India will one day assert her independence and see noon, is much appreciated by the people."[152] Soon after the partition announcement, the Suhrid

[148] Unpublished Diary of Gyanchandra Banerji.
[149] *Charu Mihir*, 25 July 1905—RNP (B) for week ending 5 August 1905.
[150] Surendranath Banerji, *A Nation in Making* (1925, 1963), p. 202.
[151] Annual Report of Anti-Circular Society, presented by Sachindraprasad Basu, *Bengalee*, 8 November 1906.
[152] Abstract of Reports from E. Bengal and Assam....during first half of December 1906. Home Public Progs A, February 1907, n. 265.

Samiti of Mymensingh decided "to rouse the people by national songs";[153] it was fortunate in having at its disposal Brojendralal Ganguli, a noted singer as well as a political agitator—we hear of him touring Noakhali as a "minstrel", for instance, in March 1907.[154]

The image of the 1905 days which has survived in the collective memory of Bengal is in fact inextricably bound up with swadeshi songs. With 16 October 1905 is associated above all Rabindranath's magnificent hymn to the motherland :

> "Let the earth and the waters and the air and the fruits of Bengal be holy, my Lord!...
> Let the minds and the hearts of all the brothers and sisters of Bengal be one, my Lord!"[155]

Sukumar Mitra (the son of Krishnakumar) tells us of the volunteers of the Anti-Circular Society spending their days in the un-bhadralok-like arduous labour of hawking swadeshi goods from door to door, urging the householders in the words of Rajanikanta Sen "to accept as their own the coarse cloth which was all that the poverty-stricken Mother could afford".[156] He also remembers volunteers with scars and bandages acquired at the Barisal Conference, reaffirming their determination "to let life end, if need be, working for the

[153] Report of Suhrid Samiti 1307-1313, translated and included in Second Supplementary Report on Samitis in the Dacca Division. Home Political Progs Deposit, October 1909, n. 1.

[154] *Bengalee*, 30 March 1907.

[155] *Banglar mati banglar jal*
Banglar bayu banglar phal
Punya hayuk punya hayuk
Punya hayuk he bhagaban/...
Bangaleer pran bangaleer man
Bangaleer ghare jata bhai-bon
Ek hayuk ek hayuk
Ek hayuk he bhagaban /

[156] Sukumar Mitra, *op. cit.*, *Mashik Basumati*, Falgun 1358 (1952).
Mayer deoa mota kapar mathay tule ne re bhai;
Deen dukhinee ma je toder tar beshi ar sadhya nai /
— Rajanikanta Sen.

Mother amid the strains of Bande Mataram".[157] Villagers in obscure Barisal hamlets thrilled to the assertion of the poet of the people, Mukunda Das, that "the cause of the motherland would be as eternal as the sun and the moon and the stars above".[158] Even after sixty years it is difficult not to be moved by the story of Ullaskar Dutta, the young revolutionary on trial for his life at Alipore, who at court one day affirmed in song his gratitude for having been born in this land of all lands. It is said that even the judges and prosecution lawyers paid their respects to the young hero by pausing at the threshhold of the courtroom to let him complete his song.[159] And it is a song by Hemchandra Kanungo, the militant rationalist who in many ways was the most remarkable among that first band of revolutionaries, which perhaps best expresses the indomitable courage and determination of some at least in that generation—"The message of India's freedom shall we preach in exile, to birds of the forest if men do not heed us; and if God Himself comes to block our way, we shall say without fear—such a God we do not need." Hemchandra, we are told, was singing this song as the prison-van carried him with his fellow prisoners down to the riverside where the ship for Andaman awaited them.[160]

157 *Loc. cit.*

Ma go jaye jena jiban chale
Shudhu jagat-majhe tomar kaje
Bande mataram bole
Amar jaye jena jiban chale /

—Kaliprasanna Kabyabisharod.

158 *Mayer nam niye bhashana taree jedin dube jabe*
Shedin rabi-chandra-dhruba-tara tarao dube jabere
Shedin tarao dube jabe /

— Sureshchandra Gupta,
Aswinikumar (in Bengali) (1923), p. 477.

159 Sukumar Mitra, *op. cit.*, Paus 1358 (1952). The song was Rabindranath's "Sarthaka janama amar janmecchi ei deshe".

160 Benoy Jiban Ghosh, *Agniyuger astraguru hemchandra* (1952), pp. 155-56. The song is little-known, and deserves reproduction in full:

Biday laíya ebe jetecchi chaliya bhai
Karmakshetre shíshu móra, kshama jata dosh tai /

The familiar themes of past greatness and present degradation recur often enough in the songs of the swadeshi period, and Hemchandra Kanungo the dissident revolutionary later on criticised with forceful if rather cruel logic the constant tendency to hark back to the glories of Hindu India.[161] But certain elements and nuances which are at least relatively new may also be discerned. Taking as a sample the 60 songs included in Hemchandra Sen's *Matrigatha* (published in 1907 from Krishnakumar Mitra's Samya Press),[162] we immediately notice that industrial devastation caused by

Kata je rahila asha,
Na purila karma-trisha,
Hridoy lukaye jala karabashe chale jai /
Bharater chhabi aki,
Hridoy-majhare rakhi,
Karagare dwipantare pujiba jethai jai /
Bharat-uddhar brate,
Na bhuliba deeksha dite
Baner bihage dhari jadi na manush pai /
Bidhi jadi ashe nije,
Badha dite hena kaje,
Nirbhoy baliba tare hena bidhi nahi chai /
Bharater nam kari,
Jachi duti kara dhari,
Pranpane sadha sabe jaha mora pari nai /
Swadhinata trishanal,
Jwalecche ebe kebal,
Prajjwalita karo tara swarthahuti diye tay /
E anal nibhaite,
Pare shudhu e-jagate
Mrityu kimba swadhinata, jeno anya kicchu nai /

161 Surely, argued Kanungo in 1928, the duty to love one's country and work for its liberation remains even if, perchance, the past is not so gloricus after all—*Banglay biplab-prachesta* (1928), p. 82.

162 Since great literature has always a tendency to rise above its times. it is safer perhaps to choose these songs to illustrate the spirit of the period—only three of which were by Rabindranath, and many of the others of frankly negligible literary merit—rather than the fifty-two included in Jogindranath Sarkar's *Bande mataram*, most of them very famous and including no less than sixteen by Rabindranath.

foreign commercial exploitation (and the consequent need for swadeshi) has become the most important single theme, being embodied in twenty-one of these pieces. The partition, in contrast, is directly referred to in only seven songs. The religious appeal is also not particularly evident, the glorification of the Hindu past finding an important place in only about five songs—though possibly here the collection is not quite representative, edited as it was by a professor of City College and published under the auspices of a staunch Brahmo leader. Ten of the songs specifically call for Hindu-Muslim unity, the most famous of these being the appeal by an unnamed Mymensingh Suhrid Samiti member to Ram and Rahim to unite iń the common cause.[163]

But the really new development, as Sukumar Mitra has rightly emphasised,[164] was the tone of selfreliance, courage in face of repression and above all of pride in the contemporary resurgence of Bengal. The old habits of slightly effeminate weeping over the present and casting nostalgic glances back towards a very largely imaginary past were gradually giving place to this new mood of confidence and optimism. Rabindranath challenged the rulers nine days before the coming into force of the partition—"Are you strong enough to sunder what fate has bound together, do you really think that our lives are yours to make or break?"[165] Some of the

[163] *Ram Rahim na juda karo bhai manta ksnati rakha ji/*
Desher katha bhaba bhaire desh amader mataji //
Hindu, Musalman, ek mar santan, tafat kena karo ji /
Dui bhaite, du-ghar bedhe, ekee deshe basati //

—Hemchandra Sen,
Matrigatha (1907), p. 35.

[164] Sukumar Mitra, *op. cit.*, *Mashik Basumati*, Falgun 1358.

[165] *Bidhir badhan katbe tumi eman shaktiman—*
Tumi ki emani shaktiman/
Amader bhanga-gara tomar hate eman abhiman—
Tomader emani abhiman/

The lines were composed on 21 Aswin 1312 (7 October 1905), as the facsimile of the original reprinted in *Gitabitan* (Visvabharati. 1358), p. 266, shows. The new spirit found magnificent expression also in Tagore's famous song :

later songs openly called for violence—thus after the Jamalpur riots Kaminikumar Bhattacharyya appealed to women to take up arms in defence of their honour,[166] and the first number of the *Yugantar* following the Maniktala arrests contained a moving poem expressing through Hindu imagery the determination to persist in the path of violence, even though the demon has destroyed the first offerings to the Mother.[167] As in the Ireland of Yeats, a 'terrible beauty' had indeed been born in swadeshi Bengal.

From the mid-fifties of the past century, the modern stage (as distinct from the traditional 'jatra') had come to occupy a distinctive place in the social life of Calcutta. A large number of patriotic plays had been written during the 1860s and '70s—the most notable of them being Dinabandhu Mitra's *Nil-darpan* (1860), Monomohan Basu's *Harischandra* (1875), Jyotirindranath Tagore's 'historical' plays, and the violently anti-British *Sarat-sarojini* (1874) and *Surendra-binodini* (1875) of Upendranath Das which served as the

Aji bangladesher hridoy hote, with its refrain--
Ogo ma, tomay dekhe dekhe ankhi na phire/
Tomar duar aji khule gyacche sonar mandire//

[166] The poem is entitled *To the Outraged Women of Jamalpur*, and contains lines like :

Apanar man rakhite janani apani kripan dhara go...
Ai shono baje bidhatar bheri, badha kateetote shushanita cchuri,
Danabdalani saja go janani! Bangalini besh ccharo go!

—Soumendra Gangopadhyay, *op. cit.*, pp. 317-18.

[167] I quote the first and the last stanzas of this poem, entitled *Bodhon* (Invocation) :

Na haite ma bodhon tomar
Bhangila rakhasa mangal-ghat/
Jago rana-chandi, jago ma amar
Abar pujiba charana-tat/ ...
Naramunda cchire paraiba gale
Sarbbanga tomar sajaba kankale
Raktambudhi aj kariya manthan
Tuliya aniba swadhinata-dhan—
Jago rana-chandi, jago ma amar
Abar pujiba charana-tat/

—*Yugantar*, 26 Baisakh 1315 (9 May 1908).

immediate provocation for the passage of Lytton's Dramatic Performances Act in 1876. But then for about twenty years the political interest is swamped almost entirely by the religious, and the earlier plays of Girischandra Ghosh—the dominant influence from about 1880 onwards—concentrate on preaching orthodox values through Puranic themes or sentimental domestic dramas.[168] As in the case of swadeshi songs, the intrinsic connection which has been so often assumed between revivalism and extremism seems somewhat open to question.

The swadeshi movement brought about a sudden swing in fashion back to patriotic-cum-historical plays. In January 1906, no less than five such plays were being staged at the Star and the Minerva—the two leading theatres of Calcutta.[169] A spate of 'historical' plays appeared between 1905 and 1908—Girischandra's *Sirajuddoulah* (1905), *Mir Kasim* (1906) and *Chhatrapati Shivaji* (1907); Dwijendralal Roy's *Pratapsingha* (1905), *Durgadas* (1906) and *Mebar-patan* (Fall of Mewar—1908); and Khirodeprasad Vidyabinode's *Pratapaditya* (1906), *Padmini* (1906), *Palasir prayaschitta* (Atonement for Plassey—1907) and *Nandakumar* (1908). Such plays often included patriotic songs which became extremely popular, as for instance those in the *Mebar-patan*.[170] All these dramas were really variations on the single theme of the need for courage, unity and selfsacrifice in the battle for freedom. For obvious reasons, playwrights found it convenient to translate these very contemporary radical political ideas into pseudohistorical terms. The unfortunate fashion of using Muslim rulers as convenient whipping-boys for the British (which Bankimchandra and his generation had inaugurated) was still largely maintained, particularly by Dwijendralal—though it is true that there was some search for

[168] Cf. Sukumar Sen, *Bangla sahityer itihas*, Volume II (1943).

[169] Khirodeprasad Vidyabinode's *Padmini*, Dwijendralal Roy's *Pratapsingha* and Amritlal Bose's *Sabash bangalee* at the Star Theatre, Girischandra Ghosh's *Sirajuddoulah* and Haranath Bose's *Jagaran* at the Minerva. *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 6 January 1906.

[170] For a further discussion of the literary and artistic aspects of swadeshi, see Chapter X below.

Muslim heroes (e.g. Mir Kasim, and even Siraj), and the *Mebar-patan* pinpointed Hindu intolerance as one factor behind the Rajput collapse.

Plays dealing directly with the partition and the swadeshi movement are relatively few in number. Amarendranath Dutta's *Banger angacched ba The Partition of Bengal* (Sravana 1312/ July-August 1905) contains a reference to students taking the swadeshi vow, but is otherwise rather old-fashioned and even mendicant in its outlook.[171] *Jagaran* (Awakening), written by Dr Haranath Bose (December 1905), describes the social boycott of an antiswadeshi zamindar; the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* described its "central idea" to be "that an agitation carried on by the Hindus in order to be successful must be carried on Hindu lines, Hindu principles and Hindu methods".[172] But by far the most interesting among the plays of this type is *Sabash bangali* (Bravo Bengalis!) written by Amritalal Bose and staged for the first time at the Star Theatre on 25 December 1905. The atmosphere of the early days of the swadeshi movement is brilliantly caught for us here through sparkling dialogue interspersed with songs.

The play opens with a chorus of women hailing their menfolk's return to the ways of the 'true Bengali'.[173] Then we meet in quick succession Nayanchand and Garabini, worried about their son's marriage prospects now that the market value of the university degree is falling; Aghorenath the head-clerk of a British firm and his wife, listening to a swadeshi lecture from their student son just released from jail; student picketers persuading an Anglicised lady (who turns out

171 The play ends with a eulogy for Edward VII and a prayer to him to rescind the partition—*Banger angacched ba The Partition of Bengal*, p. 7.

172 *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 5 January 1906.

173 *Aj shubhadine shubhakshane mathay nicchi baran dala /*
Holo bangali pher bangali ulu delo bangabala /
There is a reference too to the movement of boycott of colleges:
Dhik dhik dhik BA MA pash,
Double shelami diye golamir ash /
—*Sabash bangali*, p. 1 (Prastabana).

to be their professor's wife) to give up her bideshi purchases —of which they proceed to make a bonfire; and Jenkins the Anglo-Indian portrayed with unusual sophistiçation as being torn by conflicting loyalties.[174] There is also a zamindar, doing a little tight-rope walking, eager for a title and yet eventually giving some money secretly for swadeshi; a shopkeeper merrily profiteering in swadeshi goods—a very real problem of those days; a drunkard who makes what is for him the supreme sacrifice—giving up foreign wine;[175] and a corrupt policeman concocting a swadeshi case by instigating the drunkard to shout 'Bande Mataram'. Meanwhile on the streets outside cobblers sing a rollicking tune expressing their determination not to touch foreign shoes;[176] similar sentiments are voiced by washerwomen and hawkers selling bangles. Fashionable ladies abandon foreign powder and scent for the home-made products of H. Bose, which their husbands now prefer.[177] The play ends on an almost Gandhian note, with women going back to the charka (spinning-wheel).[178] It is interesting that by the very

[174] On being told by his English superior to discipline the Bengali clerks, Jenkins feels in his veins the conflict between his mother's and his 'dad's' blood, but eventually the mother wins.

Ibid, Act I, 5, p. 21.

[175] *Bali—je ja pari nijer matan kara chai to kaj,*
Tomra gorar golami ccharo, ami tar mad chharloom aj/

—*Ibid*, Act II, 4, p. 49.

[176] *Babuder jutiti cchiriya gele ki hobo,*
Ei muchi bole dakle hamay kathati ar na kobo /
Bostock, Dawson, Latimar, tader mukhe jharu mai,
Arto o jutiti bhai silai korte na lobo /

—*Ibid*, Act I. 4, p. 18.

[177] *Shohag kore bale tomar thakbe na apshosh,*
Chule debo kuntaleen roomale dilkhosh,
Habe pran paritosh mekhe dishi Boser essence monohara /

—*Ibid*, Act II, 5, p. 58.

[178] *Amra abar katbo suta charkate*
Jabona ar sakhi seje sabhar majhe pharkate /

—*Ibid*, Act II, 5, p. 61.

The second line, as well as the placing of this last scene in the Chandimandap of a village, are reminders of the social conservatism

vividness of its reflexion of reality, *Sabash bangali* occasionally and quite unconsciously also reveals some of the limitations of the movement. Aghorenath's wife is indignant particularly because a constable—who after all belongs by birth to the servant class, she says—has dared to lay his plebeian hands on her darling son.[179] Pashdanga village never becomes quite as real as the scenes of Calcutta life; Abdul Sobhan the swadeshi Muslim fails to convince when he declares that Hindus are his elder brothers;[180] and—most revealing of all—no peasant appears on the stage, the village movement being clearly a matter of schoolboys led by their patriotic headmaster.

From 1908 onwards, the government started taking repressive measures against allegedly seditious plays. Kunjabihari Ganguli was prosecuted under section 124 A for his *Matri puja*, which had been performed at many places in Calcutta during 1907 (including the Industrial Exhibition grounds) and published on 15 July 1908. This was a Puranic allegory, showing the revolt of the "330 million devas" (gods) against the 'daityas' (demons) ruling over them; the former have as leaders "Surendra, Tilak Gungadhar, Bepin, Rabi and Aswinicoomar", while the demon-king is portrayed as a good-hearted man misled by the wicked minister "Krurjan" (the wicked man).[181] The 1876 Act, which had never been repealed, proved a more effective weapon, and the thirteen plays banned under it on 18

which often accompanied the stress on indigenous customs and values in the swadeshi period.

[179] *Ki ashchijji, ki ashchijji ! Jader bap khuro amader bari bason maje, paye tel makhay, taderee chhele-pule paharola hoye kina bhaddar loker chheleder hat dhare /*

[180] *Hindu amader dada amra chhoto bhai, banglar Hindu-musalmane bibad kakhono habena.*

—*Sabash bangali*, Act II, 2, p. 40.

[181] A description of the play by the Bengal Library librarian, along with a note from advocate-general S. P. Sinha pointing out the objectionable passages, is to be found in Home Political Progs A, May 1909, n. 110-17. Cf. also *Bengalee*, 21 February 1907 for the staging of this play at the Industrial Exhibition grounds.

January 1911 included Girischandra's *Sirajuddoulah, Mir Kasim* and *Chhatrapati Shivaji;* Khirodeprasad's *Palasir prayashchitta* and *Nandakumar,* and Haripada Chatterji's *Durgasur* and *Ranajiter jiban jajna.*[182]

The stage could reach only urban audiences; in the villages and mufassil towns, the traditional open-air folk entertainments of the 'jatra' and the 'kathakata' (recitals) were still much more important, and both were fully used during the swadeshi movement. In Barisal, Aswinikumar Dutta inspired Hemchandra Kabiratna Kabyabisharod to compose kathakatas of a new type, intermingling recent patriotic ideas with the traditional stories taken from the epics or religious texts.[183] Bhupendranath Dutta tells us of a 'Swadeshi Ramayana' used at such recitals which had been written by Girin Mukherji, a priest of the Kalighat temple.[184] The Pabna district conference on June 1907 included in its programme a swadeshi kathakata by "a Kalighat Pandit" (possibly the same man);[185] and two months later we hear of Nilmoni Bhattacharyya, another "famous swadeshi kathakata" (sic) entertaining the gentry of the same town.[186]

In jatra the great name of course is Jogneswar De, far better known as Mukunda Das. An ex-student of Brojomohan school and a Saivite minstrel, Mukunda Das during the swadeshi days—quite spontaneously at first, we are told, turned to composing jatras filled with patriotic themes and songs. of which the most famous was the *Matri puja* (1906).[187] The country is being plundered by foreigners, this jatra declares: "Matangi, the goddess of war, is eagerly preparing herself for war... Mukunda advises people who wish to fare

[182] Short Notes on Some Proscribed Books and List of Prohibited Dramas—HFM(B), No. 50.
[183] Saratkumar Roy, *op. cit.*, pp. 131-32.
[184] Bhupendranath Dutta, *Bharater dwitiya swadhinata sangram* (3rd ed., 1949), p. 126. This kathakata included the famous swadeshi song —"Swadesher dhuli swarnarenu bali".
[185] *Bande Mataram*, 25 June 1907.
[186] *Ibid*, 16 August 1907.
[187] Sureschandra Gupta, *op. cit.*, p. 476.

well to give up a service in which they are no better than slaves."[188] The Fortnightly Report from Eastern Bengal and Assam of 24 January 1907 states—"Babu Aswini Kumar Dutt of Barisal is the patron of a theatrical or *jatra party* that is now touring through the districts of Faridpur and Backergunj. This party enacts pieces written in support of the swadeshi movement and in ridicule of the government, and in their repertoire there is a play which caricatures the resignation of Sir Bamfylde Fuller, and another representing the gradual conversion of an Anglicised deputy magistrate to the swadeshi cause."[189] The district magistrate of Bakargunj noted that particularly after the regulation of meetings ordinance of May 1907, the jatra became "an effective substitute for a swadeshi meeting as it reaches all classes and spreads seditious doctrines among them. At the same time it is very difficult to deal with."[190]

Other jatra groups caught the contagion from Mukunda, particularly Bhusan Das in Barisal, and the Eastern Bengal and Assam government reported on 21 December 1908 that "at Shikarpur in the Chittagong district a number of villagers have formed themselves into a theatrical company and have given a series of plays of an unequivocally anti-British nature".[191] Mukunda Das himself "at one time or another visited nearly every district in Bengal";[192] his visit to Noakhali in March 1907, we are told, had a tremendous impact even on the hitherto apathetic Muslim masses, and it became "a common sight to see the rustic Mahomedans pass the streets of the town with one of Mukunda Babu's songs upon their

[188] Note by C. J. Stevenson-Moore, 9 September 1907. This mentions also interestingly similar jatra groups in Poona, Nasik and Amraoti. Home Political Progs A, January 1908, n. 1-2.

[189] Home Public Progs A, February 1907, n. 154.

[190] Resume of affairs in Bakargunj for 1907, by Mr Hughes-Buller, district magistrate. Home Political Progs A, April 1908, n. 24.

[191] Fortnightly Report from Eastern Bengal and Assam for the second half of November 1908—No. 4422SB, 21 December 1908. Home Political Progs A, January 1909, n. 95.

[192] Home Political Progs A, January 1908, n. 1-2.

lips".[193] That the government had become quite worried is indicated by the frequent references to Mukunda Das in official reports some of which have been cited above. A sub-inspector of Sarupkati tried to intimidate the jatra party by travelling with it and taking down the names of the performers.[194] The magistrate of Dacca ordered Mukunda Das to leave his district, and even paid for the cost of the party's journey back to Bakargunj.[195] At Madaripur (Faridpur) and Magura (Jessore), peformances of Mukunda Das's party were banned under section 144.[196] Finally, on 16 November 1908 a case under section 109 was instituted against Mukunda Das, and the patriotic jatrawalla was sentenced to a year's rigorous imprisonment on 23 January 1909.[197]

The projection through periodic festivals of a total image of the motherland, with its distinctive culture, traditions and heroes, had been started in Bengal as far back as 1867 when the first Chaitra or Hindu Mela was organised by Ganendranath and Dwijendranath Tagore and Nabagopal Mitra. Here once again the swadeshi age revived after a twenty-year gap the techniques of the sixties and seventies, though of course the immediate inspiration for the Shivaji Festival came from Tilak and Maharashtra. A son of Maharashtra domiciled in Bengal, Sakharam Ganesh Deuskar, organised the first Shivaji Utsava in Calcutta;[198] it became an annual ceremony, at which the alleged role of Shivaji in founding the ideal of a single Hindu rashtra (Hindu state) was emphasised. Rabindranath wrote a very famous poem along these lines for the festival of 1904. Nostalgia for lost Hindu glory did not at first imply any very considerable degree of political radical-

[193] *Bengalee*, 30 March 1907.

[194] Home Political Progs A, April 1908, n. 24.

[195] Home Political Progs A, January 1908, n. 1-2.

[196] *Nabasakti*, 18 January 1908—RNP(B) for week ending 25 January 1908. *Bengalee*, 2 April 1908. The Jessore ban is mentioned also in Home Political Progs A, April 1908, n. 24.

[197] Home Political Progs A, January 1909, n. 94. Home Political Progs Deposit, March 1910, n. 1.

[198] *Sahitya-sadhak charitmala*, Volume VIII, No. 90, p. 35.

ism; Pal, for instance, at the first Shivaji Utsava somewhat vaguely talked about "this holy, this divine imperialism in modern India—a sentiment for which, next to God, we are thankful to the British government..."[199] But after 1905, the cult was taken over on a large scale by the extremists, the June 1906 festival being attended by Tilak, Khaparde and Munje. This was accompanied by an intensification of the Hindu tone, and the 1906 festival introduced for the first time an image of Bhawani which aroused a lot of criticism and led to the Brahmo-led Anti-Circular Society boycotting the whole function.[200] Attempts were also made to spread the cult in the districts; thus we hear of Shivaji Utsavas being held in May 1907 at Kharagpur, Kushtia and Dadupur village in Nadia[201] and at Panihati in March 1908.[202] The Suhrid Samiti of Mymensingh also observed Shivaji Utasava regularly from 1902.[203]

It could never have been very easy to acclimatise the Shivaji cult in Bengal, with its folk memories of disastrous Bargi raids, and a search for indigenous heroes around whom similar festivals could be organised began fairly early. In October 1902 Sarala Debi started the Birastami celebrations as part of her programme of physical training for young men.[204] The ceremony involved among other things the

[199] Bepinchandra Pal, *Swadeshi and Swaraj* (1954). p. 77. His original speech contained passages even more effusively loyalist. and these were tactfully dropped when it was published in 1907 in his *New Spirit* (1907). Cf. Haridas and Uma Mukherjee, *Bepin Pal and India's Struggle for Swaraj* (1958), p. 13.

[200] *Bangadarshan*, Bhadra-Aswin 1313. Aswin 1314. The Annual Report of the Anti-Circular Society states : "We could not take part in the last Shivaji festival, lest it might wound the susceptibilities of our numerous Mahomedan workers and sympathisers." *Bengalee*, 9 November 1906. For the ideological significance of this very interesting controversy, see above, Ch. II.

[201] *Bande Mataram*, 21 May, 28 May and 30 May 1907.

[202] *Sandhya*, 3 March 1908—RNP(B) for week ending 7 March 1908.

[203] Report of Suhrid Samiti 1307-1313 (1 June 1909). Home Political Progs Deposit, October 1909, n. 1.

[204] *Bengalee*, 15 October 1902. The celebrations were held at the

recitation of a Sanskrit verse listing the heroes of India—Krishna, Rama, Bhisma, Drona, Karna, Arjuna, Bhima, Meghnad, Rana Pratap, Shivaji, Ranjit Singh, Pratapaditya and Sitaram.[205] Conservative eyebrows were raised by this initiative of a young and unmarried girl,[206] but the Birastami rites were kept up in the succeeding years, and even after Sarala Debi's marriage and departure for Punjab such a festival was held in Calcutta in September 1906.[207] Hers also was the initiative in starting the Pratapaditya Utsava in the summer of 1903. The Mymensingh Suhrid Samiti (with which Sarala Debi was closely associated) took up this festival with particular enthusiasm from 1904, and at the second such utsava (6 Baisakh 1312/ April 1905) "an attempt was for the first time made to use the word 'Bande Mataram' as a national call".[208] Next year the historian Nikhilnath Roy wrote a five-hundred-page work on Pratapaditya in a valiant bid to make a national movement out of what was in all probability nothing more than a feudal rebellion.[209] In 1905, an attempt was also made to inaugurate a Sitaram festival, to be held at Muhamadpur (Jessore) along traditional mela lines;[210] but this was not very successful, Hirendranath Dutta complaining bitterly a few months later that the leaders were interested only in Calcutta Town Hall functions.[211] A hero nearer in point of time was Bankimchandra, who came to be accepted as a kind of father-figure. Regular pilgrimages were organised to

house of Sarala Debi's father, Janakinath Ghoshal (26 Ballygunj Circular Road).

[205] Sarala Debi, *Jivaner jhara-pata* (1957), pp. 140-42.

[206] The *Rangalay* of 6 September 1903 thought Sarala Debi's conduct unworthy of a Hindu woman. RNP(B) for week ending 12 September 1903.

[207] *Bengalee*, 29 September 1906.

[208] Report of Suhrid Samiti, *op. cit.* Home Political Progs Deposit, October 1909, n. 1.

[209] Nikhilnath Roy, *Pratapaditya*, 20 September 1906.

[210] *Hitavadi*, 3 February 1905, RNP (B) for week ending 11 February 1905.

[211] *Bhandar*, Baisakh 1312.

his birth-place at Kanthalpara near Naihati, particularly by the Bande Mataram Samproday led by the socially orthodox Sureshchandra Samajpati.[212] Occasional trips to Belur[213] and long illustrated articles on Ramkrishna and Vivekananda in Brahmabandhab's shortlived weekly *Swaraj*[214] indicate perhaps the beginnings of another cult, which was to assume enormous proportions later on.

In all this search for heroes, a very strong Hindu tone is undeniable, and it is not surprising that Muslims protested—not only the incorrigibly communal *Mihir-o-sudhakar*, but also journals broadly sympathetic towards nationalism, like the *Soltan* and *Mussalman*. The *Soltan* put forward its case very effectively on 8 June 1906: "It has yet to be shown that Sivaji had any vast patriotic schemes in his contemplation... We know that the object of our Hindu brethren in celebrating the Sivaji festival is neither to wound Musalman feelings nor to vilify the reign of Aurangzeb... But...in order to give high praise to Sivaji, one cannot but censure Musalman rule."[215] It is true that some attempts were made by nationalists to discover cult-figures which could appeal to both communities. Thus the *Yugantar* on 8 July 1906 suggested a festival in honour of Mir Kasim.[216] An Akbar festival was proposed several times,[217] and actually observed in Bombay on 15 October 1907.[218] In September 1905 Aswinicoomar Banerji made the even more interesting proposal for a revival and political use of the cult of Satya-Pir to

[212] *Bengalee*, 30 September 1906; *Swaraj*, 8 Baisakh 1314 (April 1907).

[213] As by the volunteers of the Bande Mataram Samproday on 4 March 1906. *Bengalee*, 7 March 1906.

[214] *Swaraj*, 10 Chaitra 1313, 22 Baisakh 1314 (March, May 1907).

[215] RNP(B) for week ending 16 June 1906. For a more detailed study of Muslim reactions, see below, Ch. VIII.

[216] RNP(B) for week ending 14 July 1906.

[217] On 13 October 1905 Satischandra Ghosh of Dacca in a private letter to Aswinicoomar Banerji made such a suggestion; the *Bengalee* of 14 October 1906 published two letters making similar proposals.

[218] *Bande Mataram*, 25 October 1907.

promote Hindu-Muslim unity.[219] But none of these ideas seem to have been taken up with any degree of seriousness.

A few interesting efforts were made also to evolve a truly nonsectarian and secular imagery, the symbols here being mainly adapted from the traditions of western democratic movements. Such efforts originated principally from the Anti-Circular Society, inspired and guided by that remarkable Brahmo Krishnakumar Mitra—about whom Bepinchandra Pal once complained that he would have fought as strenuously for the rights of Africans, and hence was "too universalist and cosmopolitan" to be "a true Nationalist".[220] At the Boycott Day celebrations of 7 August 1906, volunteers of this society presented Surendranath with a "National Flag" in red, green and yellow; the eight half-bloomed lotuses in it stood for the provinces of India, the sun and the crescent moon symbolised the Hindus and the Muslims, while at the centre was inscribed Bande Mataram in Devanagri.[221] The banner of free India which Madame Cama unfurled a year later (August 1907) at the Stuttgart Congress of the Socialist International was very similar to this. The point of contact between the two flags was probably Hemchandra Kanungo, then learning bomb-manufacture and revolutionary techniques from the Russian underground at Paris.[222] Thus the tricolour—symbol of bourgeois-democratic revolutions the world over—entered the Indian national movement. The crest of the Anti-Circular Society was a circle containing a map of India; inscribed on the map were the words "United Bengal 80,000,000; United India 300,000,000"; while around

[219] See above, Chapter V, pp. 195-96.

[220] Bepinchandra Pal, essay on *Krishnakumar Mitra* (1909), reprinted in *Character-Sketches* (1957), p. 243.

[221] Abstract of Reports from Bengal...during first half of August 1906 Enclosure A (Bengal Police Abstract No. 32, 11 August 1906). Home Public Progs B, October 1906, n. 13. *Bengalee*, 8 August 1906.

[222] Hemchandra seems to have been largely responsible for the appearance of Rana and Madame Cama at the Stuttgart Congress, and the flag was probably also prepared by him. Cf. Benoy Jiban Ghosh, *Agniyuger astraguru hemchandra* (1952), pp. 5, 117-19.

it were written "Bande Mataram" (in Devanagri), "For God and Motherland", and "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity".[223] The *Sanjibani* carried above its editorial a flag with 'Liberty' inscribed on it, and its press was the Samya (Equality). The central ceremony on the first Partition Day, 16 October 1905, had been the laying of the foundation-stone for a 'Federation Hall', planned to serve as a meeting-place and social and cultural centre for all Bengalis; have we here an echo of the federation festivals of revolutionary France, since otherwise the term seems inexplicable?[224]

Yet, as the above discussion has repeatedly indicated, orthodox religion remained overwhelmingly predominant throughout the swadeshi age. It became in fact the primary communication medium through which the leaders sought contact with the masses, and it was used also to raise the morale of the activists in the movement. As early as February 1904, the home secretary of the Government of India noted that "religious festivals are being made the occasion for collecting signatures";[225] prayer-meetings were organised at Mymensingh masjids and Dacca temples[226]; and the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* of 12 January 1904 reported that Hindu pandits and Muslim maulvis were joining the agitation. The use of religion became much more prominent as the movement really got into its stride from July 1905 onwards. The *Bengalee* reported prayer-meetings at the Faridpur Kalibari[227] and at Mymensingh (organised by the local Dharmasabha);[228] a Natore meeting on 2 August 1905 passed a resolution call-

[223] The crest appears printed as a letterhead in a letter by Krishnakumar Mitra to Aswinicoomar Banerji, 8 August 1907—*Private Papers of Aswinicoomar Banerji.*

[224] This connection was first indicated by Amit Sen, *Notes on the Bengal Renaissance* (1946), p. 57.

[225] Note by H. H. Risley, 7 February 1904. Home Public Progs A, February 1905, n. 155.

[226] *Bengalee*, 10 January 1904. *Dacca Prakash*, 28 January 1904—PNP (B) for week ending 30 January 1904.

[227] *Bengalee*, 1 August 1905.

[228] *Ibid*, 22 August 1905.

ing for religious ceremonies of both Hindus and Muslims,[229] and that there was some Muslim response is indicated by the news of special prayers being offered at the "new mosque" in Barisal[230] and by Shias in the Serampore subdivision.[231] In the last week of August 1905 a special Kali Puja to avert the partition was planned at Faridpur; the chairman of the municipality refused permission for it at the last moment.[232]

Prayers at temples or mosques were no more than a new type of mendicancy; the religious appeal of the swadeshi movement soon acquired much more militant forms. On 19 August 1905 the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* reported: "Handbills are being circulated to inform the masses that foreign salt is purified by bullock's blood, and calcined bones of cats, dogs and swine, and a similar charge was made about 'bideshi' sugar." The newsitem seriously worried British commercial and government circles. The Salt Union Ltd telegraphed its representatives in India: "...authorise most emphatic denial... if considered desirable by you invoke Government of India assistance contradict report." Turner Morrison and Company pressed for government action and the secretary of state advised an official denial,[233] but eventually the latter decided that no immediate intervention was called for, since the cheapness of foreign salt would ultimately enable it to withstand such campaigns.[234] Such allegations in fact became a standard part of the swadeshi movement, orthodox prejudice being thus called upon to supplement and strengthen the economic and political argu-

229 *Ibid*, 5 August 1905.
230 *Ibid*, 2 August 1905.
231 *Ibid*, 8 August 1905.
232 *Ibid*, 23 and 29 August 1905.
233 Telegram from Secretary of State to Viceroy, 7 November 1905. Curzon in his reply wisely pointed out that an official contradiction "would probably revive the stories and lead to imputation of our fostering sale of English at the expense of Indian article". Telegram from Viceroy to Secretary of State, 18 November 1905. Curzon Collection, MSS. Eur, F 111/175. (Telegram to and from the Secretary of State, 1905)
234 Home Public Progs Deposit, September 1905, n. 15.

ments for boycott. An official report dated 25 January 1906 notes the circulation of a similar leaflet in Birbhum.[235] At the "Pundits' meeting" of 29 August 1906 where Surendranath was "crowned", a broadsheet of Kaliprasanna Kabyabisharod was circulated detailing the impurities in foreign sugar and salt; and Surendranath himself declared that bideshi cloth too was contaminated, since it contained tallow made of fat of pigs and cows—at which the Brahman priests present shrieked "Ram ! Ram !"[236] Propaganda of this type, it must be admitted, at times became extremely vulgar, as for instance in the *Sandhya* of 3 October 1905—which compared foreign salt to the dust of a memsahib's breastbones, and condensed milk to the spittle of old men.[237]

The *Bengalee* of 1 September 1905 printed a letter suggesting that in order "to reach the poor and illiterate masses", "gurus and purohits" should be persuaded to campaign for swadeshi and, in particular, to exclude all articles of foreign manufacture from religious ceremonies. The correspondent himself was materialistically minded enough to hint that a possible way of getting the priests to do all this would be to organise periodic feasts for them. A determined and not unsuccessful attempt was made in fact to utilise the traditional religious leaders as communication media. Soon after a visit by Aswinicoomar Banerji to his home-district of Nadia in September 1905, the Brahmins of Nabadwip condemned the use of bideshi articles.[238] The *Bangabasi* of 2 September 1905 called on the Bhatpara pandits to follow the good example,[239] and the latter in fact sent emissaries to preach swadeshi to districts as far away as Monghyr and Bhagal-

[235] Report on the Agitation Against the Partition of Bengal (25 January 1906), para 57. Home Public Progs A, June 1906, n. 175.
[236] Report on the Anti-Partition and Swadeshi Movement in Bengal (7 September 1906), para 10. Abstract of Reports from Bengal... during the second half of August 1906, Enclosure C. Home Public Progs B, October 1906, n. 13.
[237] RNP(B) for week ending 14 October 1905.
[238] Home Public Progs A, June 1906, n. 175, *op. cit.*, paras 45-50.
[239] RNP(B) for week ending 9 September 1905.

pur.[240] On 24 September 1905 a big meeting of Brahmins at the house of Pashupati Bose in Bagbazar (North Calcutta) declared that, "according to Shastric rites", foreign salt, sugar and cloth could not be used in religious ceremonies.[241] The priests of the famous Jagannath temple at Puri also banned bideshi goods.[242] The role of the Brahmins in the movement is emphasised in the first Fortnightly Report from Bengal, dated 17 September 1906: "As regards the mufassal, the districts where it (the agitation) has now the strongest hold are Nadia and the Kalna Subdivision of Burdwan. In both cases, the strength of the agitation appears to be due to the fact that the Brahmans in those places have taken a leading part in the agitation and have placed great social pressure on persons otherwise indifferent. . ."[243] It is interesting to notice that the conventional distinction between moderate 'modernists' and extremist 'revivalists' breaks down on this question of the utilisation of traditional religious sentiments. The Brahmo-edited *Sanjibani* quoted with approval the opinions of "eminent pandits of Bhatpara, Nabadwip, Bikrampur and Barisal";[244] while Surendranath —"by no means orthodox in his views or conduct"—got himself anointed by Brahmin priests, in order to strengthen his hands (according to a police source) "in the struggle with Bipin Chandra Pal, who is a member of the Brahmo Samaj".[245]

Surendranath in his autobiography also claimed the credit for having originated the swadeshi vow—the pledge before a Hindu deity to abstain from foreign goods. The idea came to him quite suddenly, he says, one day, while he was addressing a meeting in the countyard of a temple

[240] Home Public Progs A, June 1906, n. 175, *op. cit.*
[241] *Bengalee*, 26 September 1905.
[242] *Ibid*, 3 March 1906.
[243] Home Public Progs B, October 1906, n. 13, para 3.
[244] *Sanjibani*, 10 August 1905— RNP (B) for week ending 19 August 1905.
[245] Abstract of Reports from Bengal. . . .during the second half of August 1906. Home Public Progs B, October 1906, n. 13.

in Magra.[246] Meetings and vows in temples became very frequent from September 1905 onwards; the *Bengalee* reports them, for instance, from Mymensingh, Baidyabati, Konnagar, Majilpur and Raipur (Birbhum district) between 5 September and 14 October 1905.[247] The famous People's Proclamation read out at the meeting of 16 October 1905 by Asutosh Chaudhuri in English and Rabindranath in Bengali was in more general terms (it did not specify the boycott) and carried no specific Hindu connotations.[248] But it had been preceded by a huge meeting at the Kalighat temple on Mahalaya day (28 September), where priests administered the swadeshi pledge to a crowd which—despite heavy rain—the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* estimated to have numbered 50,000.[249] After Morley's 'settled fact' declaration, 20,000 are reported to have taken the vow at another Kalighat meeting on 3 March 1906, with Surendranath and Kabyabisharod as the principal speakers.[250] By 1907, however, such demonstrations have become more of an extremist speciality; the puja-cum-boycott meeting at Kalighat on 9 August 1907 was addressed by Pal, Shamsundar Chakrabarti and Upadhyay,[251] and we have a letter by Brahmabandhab inviting Aswinicoomar Banerji to a similar "puja and lecture at Kalighat this evening" on 22 September 1907.[252] Vows in the name of religion were particularly useful in persuading the lower orders to stick to swadeshi. Washermen of Kalighat took a vow before Kali not to touch bideshi cloth;[253] a Kumartooli meeting organised by the Anti-Circular Society and attended largely by labourers pledged to abstain

246 Surendranath Banerji, *A Nation in Making* (1925, 1963), p. 228.
247 *Bengalee*, 5 September, 10 September, 11 October and 14 October 1905.
248 The most detailed account I have seen of the ceremonies of Partition Day appeared in the *Sanjibani* of 19 October 1905.
249 *Bengalee, Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 29 September 1905.
250 *Bengalee*, 4 March 1906.
251 *Bande Mataram*, 9 August 1907.
252 *Private Papers of Aswinicoomar Banerji.*
253 *Bengalee*, 26 September 1905.

from foreign goods in the name of Shitala;[254] and similar religious vows were taken in the early days of the movement by cobblers and washermen of Faridpur[255] and by numerous groups of artisans and servants in Barisal.[256]

Vows and religious rituals also played a notable part in cementing the unity and discipline of volunteer organisations, and they were particularly important in the early revolutionary secret societies. Hemchandra Kanungo has described the vow administered to him by Aurobindo in 1902, which included the laying of hands on a sword and a Gita and the recitation of certain Sanskrit mantras.[257] The Dacca Anushilan—the most tightly-organised and formidable of the early revolutionary groups—had a complicated system of primary (adya) and final (antya) vows, all emphasising total subordination to the leader, secrecy, and readiness to do anything for the samiti. "I will not be bound by any tie for my father, mother, relatives, kinsmen, friends, hearth and home until the object of this Samiti is fulfilled"—reads one of the vows, to be taken before the image of Kali.[258] Pulinbehari Das used to administer these vows at the old and deserted Siddheswari Kali Mandir in the suburbs of Dacca.[259] It is interesting that such rituals seem to have played little part in the work of samitis like the Anti-Circular of Calcutta and the Swadesh Bandhab of Barisal, which were oriented more towards mass action.

[254] *Ibid*, 14 March 1906.
[255] Home Public Progs A, June 1906, n. 175, *op. cit.*, para 57.
[256] The *Bengalee* of 21 September 1905 lists boycott resolutions taken by Barisal cloth-merchants, shoe-sellers, stationers, sweetmeat vendors, grocers, cobblers, washermen, barbers, and Oriya servants and cooks.
[257] Hemchandra Kanungo, *op. cit.*, p. 259. Bhupendranath Dutta gives a similar description, but states that in his case the sacred books of several religions were placed before him, since he had objected to a vow on the Gita alone. *Bharater dwitiya swadinata-sangram* (1949), p. 45
[258] Anushilan Regulations and Drill Book, and Report on the Anushilan Samiti by H. A. Salkeld, 10 December 1908, para 5. Home Political Progs Deposit, April 1909, n. 2.
[259] Nalinikishore Guha, *Banglay biplab-bad* (1923, 1954), p. 81.

If the ceremonies occasionally appear slightly childish, it must be remembered that the participants were in many cases still in their teens. The neotantric rituals affected by the revolutionary groups possibly struck a chord also in the folk memory of Bengal. For the more sophisticated, the Gita provided in those days comfort and courage in face of adversity, with its creed of 'Nishkama Karma'—interpreted to mean the selfless carrying-out of duty for duty's sake, irrespective of consequences, without craving for easy or early success. Thus the *Yugantar* found solace in the Gita after the disaster of May 1908.[260] The duty itself was deemed to have come from god, and Aurobindo urged the nationalists to remember that "You are merely instruments of God for the work of the Almighty. . .Nationalism is immortal, Nationalism cannot die; because it is no human thing, it is God who is working in Bengal".[261] One is reminded of the dogma of predestination which inspired Calvinism in its heroic age to face danger and persecution.

But the emphasis on religion had its drawbacks, as Hemchandra Kanungo was to point out with relentless logic some twenty years later.[262] Apart from its obvious role in encouraging the already-formidable trend of Muslim separatism,[263] religiosity hindered the development of the revolutionary movement in two ways. The doctrine of "Nish-

[260] "Amra deshke swadhin karibar janya je ekta brihat anushthaner suchana kariyacchi, je ekta maha broter ayojon kariyacchi, ihate jadi konodike amra apachay laksma kari, tabe tahate hatash haibana/... Janmabhumir kalyan-kamanay jahara atmadan kamana karen, tahadigake prathame atmahatmar janya prastuta haite haibe/... Jakhan prayojan bichar karite jaiya kartabya buddhi durbal haiya pare takhan ek maha purusher gambhir jnaner bhandar haite ei uttejana mantra uthiyacchila taha karmajibaner mul sutra/'Karmanyebadhi-karaste ma phaleshu kadachana'"/

—"Sadher Maran", *Yugantar*, 26 Baisakh 1315 (9 May 1908).

[261] "The Present Situation", Speech at Bombay National Union meeting 19 January 1908, Sri Aurobindo, *Speeches* (1922, 1948), pp. 8-9.

[262] Hemchandra Kanungo, *op. cit.*, Chapters V, XV.

[263] Cf. below, Chapter VIII.

kama Karma" stimulated heroism, indeed, but often on a somewhat quixotic variety; it encouraged the cult of self-sacrifice for its own sake, instead of its being regarded as part of a well-planned programme of militant action for the liberation of the country. It also obstructed the drawing of necessary lessons from the failures, while the religious aura assumed by the leaders obviously helped to promote dangerous personality cults. Mystical effusions replaced rational planning, with Aurobindo stating in the speech cited above that the patriots "have nothing to do. They have simply to obey that power... If the finger points them to prison, to the prison they go..."[264] And again, in the *Bande Mataram* (weekly edition) of 12 April 1908 : "The Mother asks us for no schemes, no plans, no methods. She herself will provide the schemes, the plans, the methods better than any that we can devise."[265] Unfortunately, as the history of the revolutionary group led by Aurobindo and his brother proves, such statements did not remain mere rhetorical flourishes.[266]

Religion, Hemchandra Kanungo further argues, also served as the perfect alibi for shirking of responsibility; it became a kind of royal road for an honourable retreat when things got too sticky.[267] Perhaps the old revolutionary was being a bit too cynical, but what seems indisputable is that the other-worldly pull of religion tended to assert itself particularly at moments of strain and frustration. Religion, cultivated at first as a means to the end of mass contact and stimulation of morale, could all too easily become an end in itself. The process of inversion is reflected clearly in Auro-

264 Sri Aurobindo, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

265 Reprinted in Haridas and Uma Mukherji, *India's Fight for Freedom* (1958), p. 251.

266 I have in mind in particular the attempt on the mayor of Chandernagore (which Hemchandra has characterised as a "senseless" act —*op. cit.*, pp. 238-39) and the almost incredible foolhardiness of Barindrakumar Ghosh. For a more detailed discussion see below, Chapter IX.

267 Hemchandra Kanungo, *op. cit.*, pp. 22-24, 57, 63, 129-33, 339-42.

bindo's famous Uttarpara speech after his acquittal. "I spoke once before with this force in me and I said then that this movement is not a political movement and that nationalism is not politics but a religion, a creed, a faith. I say it again today, but I put it in another way. I say no longer that nationalism is a creed, a religion, a faith; I say that it is the Sanatan Dharma which for us is nationalism."[268] And so the revolutionary leader becomes the yogi of Pondicherry, Jatindranath Bandopadhyay ends his days as Swami Niralamba and the Ramkrishna Mission provides a refuge for many a tired revolutionary.[269]

Such developments, however, still lay in the future in 1905, and in the halcyon days of the swadeshi movement religion was thought to be of special value to nationalism. Not only did it have an imaginative appeal of unequalled potency; it could also be used to pressurise recalcitrants. Violators of the swadeshi pledge could be threatened with 'social boycott', the traditional weapon of caste discipline—and thus the appeal to imagination came to be supplemented by an appeal to fear.

IV. The Appeal to Fear

Picketing of shops selling foreign goods was of course the most obvious and direct method of enforcing the boycott. As a technique this always represented a combination—in varying proportions—of persuasion and pressure, but as a whole, at least in the early days of the movement, it seems to have been remarkably peaceful in character. The superintendent of the Calcutta police reported on 21 September 1905 : "The inducement has been by argument and not by force. These lads or boys have been furnished with small printed or manuscript slips and these they tendered to the purchaser or would-be purchaser. The slips set forth, that any person buying imported goods will drink the blood of

[268] Sri Aurobindo, *Uttarpara Speech* (4th ed., 1943), p. 20.
[269] Nalinikishore Guha has given a list of sixteen famous revolutionaries who became sannyasis—*op. cit.*, pp. 354-55.

his father or mother and would practically kill a lac of Bramhins (sic)."[270] In a letter to Curzon dated 8 October 1905, lieutenant-governor Fraser made the admission that "it is remarkable how little there has been of violence. The agitators have tried to keep within the limits of the law."[271] At Banoripara in Bakargunj, the Rules of the Vigilance Committee of Volunteers stated that "volunteers should not use force or take recourse to oppression, words or abuses in dealing with buyers and sellers of bideshi", but "use sweet words and flattering expressions, and in some instances throw themselves at their feet". Volunteers assigned to "hats and bazars" "should not prevent any bideshi goods seller or purchaser from selling or purchasing, but they should take a note of those that sell or buy the same, so that the president may go to their house and request them not to do so again". Only if such persuasion failed would the "executive committee" take "proper steps".[272]

But picketing, however peaceful in intention, became very soon the chief target for stringent and fairly effective repressive measures. Occasional clashes with customers leading to charges of illegal interference could hardly be avoided, and in any case were fairly easy to manufacture; the educational authorities could be induced by pressure to discipline the student picketers; and minor incidents or brawls could be made the excuse for the quartering of punitive police. On 3 October 1905 Curzon made the characteristic remark : "It is no great consolation to know that while the Calcutta streets are in the hands of agitators Mr Stevenson-Moore is writing a Note. As I said in Council last Friday I am not satisfied that the local government has shown either firm-

[270] Halliday to Carlvle, 21 September 1905. Home Public Progs B, October, n. 114-15.

[271] Curzon Collection, MSS. Eur, F 111/211 (Volume 32). Letters and Telegrams from Persons in India, July-November 1905.

[272] A copy of these rules was found during a police search at the house of Rajanikanta Guha, headmaster, Banoripara school. Samitis in the Bakargunj District—Home Political Progs Deposit, April 1909, n. 2, Part II. No. 19.

ness or courage. . . ." Simla prodded Darjeeling by telegram three days later, pointedly reminding the local government that it "possesses large powers to protect the public by means of additional police", and wanting to know what steps had been taken "to punish students who have misconducted themselves".[273] By November 1905 the machinery of repression had gone into full action, the most well-known instances being the Carlyle and Lyon Circulars directed against students[274] and the police atrocities in Barisal. In 1907 a pamphlet listed twenty-eight of the more famous swadeshi cases; fifteen of these concerned picketing.[275]

Picketing in Calcutta itself was snuffed out by the government with surprising ease once the first wave of the movement receded after October 1905. We find the *Sandhya* complaining as early as 8 November 1905: "The sale of English cloths has begun briskly again in Calcutta."[276] Two years later, the Fortnightly Report from Bengal gave the 'pleasant' news that "In the Calcutta markets, the Pujas passed off quietly, and there was no picketing or other active interference on behalf of swadeshi goods."[277] Things were quite different in East Bengal, where the samiti organisation developed remarkably during 1907, and volunteers often armed with lathis frequently visited 'melas' and 'hats' in a determined campaign to enforce the boycott. Bakargunj as always was the storm-centre; here there took place what the district magistrate described as "the long fight for Jhalakati". Volunteers "occupied" that very important mart in April, and similar attempts were made at the Amua, Kaukhali and Baufal 'hats' about this time. By the end of the

[273] Home Public Progs B, October 1905, n. 114-15.
[274] The text of these circulars, dated 10 October and 16 October 1905. is given in Parliamentary Papers (House of Commons) 1906, Volume 81 Cd 3242. (Resignation of J. Bampfylde Fuller).
[275] Umakanta Hazari, *Banga-jagaran o swadesher nana-katha* (Chaitra 1313/1907), pp. 62-66.
[276] RNP(B) for week ending 18 November 1905.
[277] Fortnightly Report from Bengal, No. 4035 P, 15 November 1907—Home Political Progs A, December 1907, n. 42, para 2.

year, however, after a series of prosecutions for intimidation, the emphasis even in Barisal was shifting to the more subtle method of social boycott.[278] Between April 1907 and January 1909, there were fifty recorded instances of interference with the sale of English goods in Eastern Bengal and Assam —fifteen of them from Bakargunj.[279] An indication of the ups and downs of picketing in Bengal is given by a consolidated statement dated 6 March 1911 describing "fluctuations in crime connected with the unrest" for the years 1905-10. Reported cases of intimidation numbered 23 between July 1905 and April 1907; 22 between April and November 1907; 43 between November 1907 and December 1908; 2 in 1909, and 4 in 1910.[280]

Social ostracism was the traditional weapon of the Hindu samaj against nonconformists and rebels. Brahmos and other social reformers in the nineteenth century had faced considerable persecution along these lines, and in the nineties a bitter controversy had raged over the position of the young men returning from England.[281] The idea of a social boycott of persistent sellers or buyers of foreign goods had thus a natural appeal to the more tradition-oriented of the swadeshi leaders; many others who in personal beliefs were not particularly orthodox acquiesced in or even welcomed the technique on pragmatic grounds. For while picketers could be easily identified and brought to trial on charges of intimidation, no one surely could be prosecuted for breaking off all social ties with an unpatriotic citizen. The *Amrita Bazar*

[278] Resume of affairs in Bakargunj for 1907. by Hughes-Buller (district magistrate). Home Political Progs A, April 1908, n. 24.

[279] Figures for the other districts are : Dacca 5, Tippera 12, Faridpur 9, Noakhali 3, Rajshahi 2, Mymensingh 1, Rangpur 1, unspecified 2. Intimidation at melas or fairs is not included in this list. Home Political Progs Deposit, August 1909, n. 26, Appendix III (A).

[280] Home Political Progs Deposit, March 1911, n. 13.

[281] In 1893 Rabindranath wrote a remarkable article on this controversy—*Samudra-yatra* (Sea-Voyage)—R.R., XII. Speaking from personal experience, Dwijendralal Roy violently attacked the excommunication of men returning from England in his pamphlet *Ekghare* (Ostracism) in January 1889—*Rachanabali* (1964), Volume 1.

Patrika of 6 September 1905 published a letter calling for a social boycott of 'bideshi' users; the *Daily Hitavadi* took up the campaign in December and January, suggesting in particular that young men should refuse to marry daughters of oppressive police officers;[282] the *Sandhya* on 1 March 1906 extended the call to title-holders, members of councils and honorary magistrates, and all who begged favours from feringhees.[283] The *Hitavarta*—the Hindi weekly edited by Kabyabisharod—enumerated on 28 January 1906 the various items in the social boycott programme: "(1) None shall eat and drink with them, (2) None shall intermarry with them, (3) Washermen shall not wash their clothes, (4) Barbers shall not shave them, (5) None shall buy from or sell to them, (6) Boys and girls shall be instructed not to play with their children."[284] In April 1907, Aurobindo exalted social boycott to the position of one of the "canons" of passive resistance, declaring it to be "legitimate and indispensable as against persons guilty of treason to the nation".[285]

Contemporary newspapers and official reports contain abundant information about instances of successful social boycott. Thus, to give an early example, the *Hitavarta* of 24 December 1905 tells us about Pandit Brajendranath Smriti Tirtha of the Bhattacharyya family of Maheshpur (a village in Jessore) going round visiting even lowly homes, administering swadeshi oaths in temples, and excommunicating some ten to fifteen men for sticking to 'bideshi'. Maheshpur villagers had become "converts to swadeshism and their ancient religion".[286] On 11 May 1906, the *Sandhya* reported six cases

[282] *Daily Hitavadi*, 25 December 1905—RNP(B) for week ending 30 December 1905. Cf. also *Ibid*, 9 January 1906—RNP(B) for week ending 13 January 1906.

[283] RNP(B) for week ending 10 March 1906.

[284] RNP(B) for week ending 3 February 1906.

[285] Aurobindo, *Doctrine of Passive Resistance* (1948), pp. 53, 58. The essay was first published as a series of articles in the *Bande Mataram*, 9-23 April 1907.

[286] RNP(B) for week ending 6 January 1906.

of social boycott from Vikrampur.[287] The technique was used in a really effective fashion in certain East Bengal districts, with Bakargunj once again setting the pace for the others. An official report describes social boycott to have been "the favourite coercive weapon" of the Swadesh Bandhab Samiti; it included boycott by Brahmins, exclusion from pujas, prevention of marriages and withdrawal of the services of barbers, washermen, servants, legal practitioners, even doctors (in a few cases)—and prostitutes![288] The rules of the samiti enjoined volunteers to set up a watchman over every ten to twelve householders to detect violators of the swadeshi vow and organise the social boycott of such families.[289] The first annual report of the samiti claimed for its village branches no less than 346 cases of social boycott;[290] the report for the second year stated that swadeshi had become the way of life for most Hindu families in the villages, but still some seventy to eighty persons had had to be boycotted.[291]

The most famous example of social boycott in Barisal concerned the "crucial one" of the Saha merchants, who controlled "a considerable portion of the cloth-supply of the district".[292] Brindaban, Radhakanta, Durgacharan and Madanmohan Saha had joined a swadeshi-sponsored Mahajan Samiti after the Barisal conference, promising not to sell Manchester cloth any more; they broke the pledge at the end of the year, allegedly after seeing advertisements of bilati goods inside the pandal of the Calcutta Congress. Madhu-

[287] RNP(B) for week ending 19 May 1906.
[288] R. Nathan's Note on the Swadesh Bandhab Samiti, 9 December 1908, in Report on Samitis in the Dacca Division, Part II, No. 26, p. 74—Home Political Progs Deposit, April 1909, n. 2.
[289] Rules of Swadesh Bandhab Samiti (Baisakh 1313/1906)—*op. cit.*, No. 18.
[290] *Bengalee*, 14 September 1906.
[291] History of the Second Year of the Swadeshi Movement (22 Sravana 1313-14/1906-7)—Supplementary Report on Samitis in the Dacca Division. Home Political Progs Deposit, July 1909, n. 13.
[292] R. Nathan's Note, *op. cit.*

sudhan (the son of Brindaban Saha) later related to the district magistrate of Bakargunj the persecution undergone by them for more than two years. Their festivals were boycotted— only thirty-one turning up for instance out of the expected 5000 at a puja in the Sahas' home village of Samsuddi in February 1907. "Then I came back to Barisal and found that my Kaviraj, doctor, washerman and barber had all been induced to boycott me. I could not leave my house as I was always jeered at in the streets... The volunteers used invariably to make a sound as if they were spitting whenever they passed my shop. All through the district zamindars would not allow my boats to be moored at their ghats." Their employees were abused and assaulted, nitric acid was poured on bales of English cloth indented by them, and they occasionally received threatening letters. But the Sahas managed to survive and even made a profit out of Manchester cloth by pooling their resources, and in early 1909 (after the deportation of Aswinikumar) Madhusudhan told the magistrate: "We were very much frightened at the time but now we are reassured... I am no longer afraid, but even now I do not go out in the streets at nights."[293]

From the government point of view, the social boycott was particularly dangerous since it sometimes badly affected the morale of Hindu administrative staff and even policemen. At Bagnapara in the Kalna subdivision of Burdwan—"a hotbed of Swadeshi, and inhabited by proud Brahmins"—the threat of social boycott had become so effective by the summer of 1906 that "even the Inspector complains that for the ensuing Pujas, he will be compelled to spend an extra Rs 109 at least on his account as he dare not buy Manchester goods."[294] In Dacca district in July 1907 "social pressure is reported to have been applied to a considerable number of government

[293] Compilation regarding oppression practised upon the Barisal Sahas by political agitators and their agents. Home Political Progs Deposit, May 1909, n. 15.

[294] Report on the Anti-Partition and Swadeshi Movement in Bengal (7 September 1906) para 12—Home Public Progs B, October 1906, n. 13.

servants, including several senior officers of the police who have been engaged in enquires connected with the agitation".[295] A subinspector of Faridpur complained "that the marriages arranged for his son and daughter have been broken off through the influence of the agitators".[296] A police officer who had become notorious during the Jamalpur riots was ostracised by his fellow-villagers at Kartikpur (Faridpur district)—even his uncle joined the boycott.[297] In Bakargunj "the Sadar Inspector of Police was obliged to return British cloth bought for his daughter's wedding".[298] Even more revealing is the following extract from a Fortnightly Report: "It is stated that in consequence of the persistent annoyance to which they are exposed, the police deputed from Bengal to this district (Bakargunj) are dissatisfied, and at one time actually talked of resigning. An assurance has been given to the Government of Bengal that they will not be detained beyond the six months for which they were lent, and the DM is taking the necessary measures to secure the men's being able to procure supplies."[299] The district magistrate of Bakargunj stated that, as a precautionary measure, "nothing connected with the agitation goes to my office"—since "I cannot trust a single Hindu amla in my office at the present juncture".[300]

Effective as its use often was, reliance on social boycott

[295] Fortnightly Report on the agitation in Eastern Bengal and Assam for the period ending 6 July 1907, No. 231C, 8/9 July 1907. Home Political Progs A, August 1907, n. 4.

[296] Fortnightly Report on the agitation in Eastern Bengal and Assam for the period ending 20 July 1907, No. 315/C, 1 August 1907. Home Political Progs A, August 1907, n. 114.

[297] *Bande Mataram*, 18 June 1907.

[298] Resume of Affairs in Bakargunj for 1907—Home Political Progs A. April 1908. n. 24.

[299] Fortnightly Report on the agitation in Eastern Bengal and Assam for the period ending 20 August 1907, No. 417C, 27 August 1907. Home Political Progs A, September 1907, n. 65.

[300] Confidential Diary of District Magistrate of Backergunj for week ending 6 July 1907. Home Political Progs A, August 1907, n. 110.

meant that the movement was coming to depend to an unhealthy extent on the forces of religious and caste orthodoxy, which were naturally stronger in the countryside than in the towns. Thus it is not surprising to learn that social boycott was largely a failure in more sophisticated and urbanised West Bengal.[301] The *Daily Hitavadi* of 23 February 1908 candidly admitted that while it was "easy to convert illiterate and half-educated villagers to swadeshism, subjecting them to social control and threatening them with social boycott", things were tougher in the towns due to the decline of the traditional samaj.[302] Even in Barisal the Swadesh Bandhab Samiti regretfully confessed that "social boycott was not so firmly made use of in town as in the villages. It is for this reason that Brindaban Shaha's shop is yet standing... the town people should therefore be ashamed before the village people."[303]

A report from Pabna published in the *Bande Mataram* of 23 May 1907 vividly reveals another facet of the social boycott—its tendency, for obvious reasons, to ignore the lapses of the very rich or the influential while punishing the poorer sections of the community, who after all were probably sticking to bideshi only because it was usually so much cheaper. Swadeshi in Pabna, we are told, had been dealt a severe blow by the attitude of two very famous zamindars, no less persons than Jagadindranath Roy of Natore and Promodenath Roy of Dighapatiya. There was not a single swadeshi shop in the lands held by them, and "the illiterate Mahomedans of this part are saying that so long as we cannot turn these big Hindu zamindars into staunch Swadeshites they would not give up the use of cheap foreign goods. This is a quite reasonable plea no doubt. Our rich zamindars will use bilati goods without any hitch. But if the middle class people happen to use a pice worth of bilati goods all the fury and pressure of the Samaj will fall upon their poor

[301] As Aurobindo admitted in his April 1907 article—*op. cit.*, p. 61.
[302] RNP(B) for week ending 29 February 1908.
[303] History of the Second Year of the Swadeshi Movement. Home Political Progs Deposit, July 1909, n. 13.

heads." Conversely, the social boycott was a particular success in areas where the zamindars took the initiative in enforcing it—as at Bairashi in Faridpur district in October 1906, when "the zamindars openly prohibited the guests from attending these (Puja) festivals dressed in foreign clothing";[304] or in Dacca district in September 1907, from where "several cases are reported of the enforcement of the boycott by petty local zamindars. The weapon used is fear of social excommunication, and the shopkeepers have, therefore, refused to give any information against the persons pressing them."[305]

We do come across a few instances of pressure from ordinary village folk. Thus at Nabinagar in Tippera, "the president of the Panchayet organised a local band, and attempted through their agency to compel a local zamindar to close his market to foreign goods. On his refusal, the panchayet set up an opposition hat, and it was necessary to send a part of police to prevent a breach of the peace."[306] Again, in the Manikgunj subdivision of Dacca, we hear of a "president of a Panchayet telling a chowkidar that as a public servant he must comply with the wishes of the people and abstain from the use of foreign cloth".[307] But much more typical was the "organised bullying which worked from the top downwards", to borrow the expressive phrase used by Namier in describing eighteenth-century English politics. After all, even the panchayet heads most probably were upper-caste village bhadralok. The *Sandhya* of 1 October 1907 reflected with brutal clarity what was probably a not uncommon mental attitude : "The hawker should be told that, unless he

[304] "Swadeshi at Faridpur", *Bengalee*, 3 October 1906.

[305] Fortnightly Report, Eastern Bengal and Assam, for the period 4-19 September 1907, No. 509C, 25 September 1907. Home Political Progs A, October 1907, p. 76.

[306] Fortnightly Report, Eastern Bengal and Assam, for the period ending 6 August 1907, No. 359C, 12 August 1907. Home Public Political Progs A, September 1907, n. 44.

[307] Fortnightly Report, Eastern Bengal and Assam, for the period ending 20 August 1907, No. 417C, 27 August 1907. Home Public Political Progs A, September 1907, n. 65.

wears swadeshi clothes his articles will not be purchased by anybody." "Lower class people", it adds, who stick to bideshi should not be helped "in their difficulties and distress. The beggar should not be given alms, if he does not sing patriotic songs."[308] Such facts and attitudes help us to understand Rabindranath's fiery condemnation of the whole technique of social boycott in 1908 as fundamentally immoral, anti-human, and a positive encouragement to the slave-mentality which has been the curse of our country.[309] They explain too the bitterness behind the portrait of Sandwip, the swadeshi leader, in his *Ghare-baire* (The Home and the World).

It was still conventional in the swadeshi period to assume that the zamindars were the natural leaders of the community and particularly of village society, even while deploring—more in sorrow than in anger—the extravagance and inertia of many of them.[310] That this reflected social realities is indicated by the following official comment dated January 1908, analysing the movement in Mymensingh: "The principal agents for fostering disloyal agitation in this division are pleaders, mukhtears, medical practitioners, students and others of the bhadralok class, but the machinations of these persons in rural areas can never have serious result...unless they have the zamindars behind them... Accordingly it is found that where boycott and political agitation are most dangerous and

308 RNP(B) for week ending 5 October 1907.

309 Rabindranath, *Sadupay* (The Right Way), Sravana 1315 (1908). R.R. X, p. 527.

310 Thus an article entitled "Zamindars and Zamindary Management —A Brief Survey of the Situation" in *Dawn*, September 1902, emphasised the duties of zamindars as "the leaders of our society". Jnanendralal Roy in the *Bangadarshan* of Baisakh 1314 (1907) described a regime of autonomous paternal zamindars to be his ideal for Bengal, and felt that tenancy legislation was shattering his hopes by giving too many rights to the peasants. In 1914 Bamacharan Majumdar reiterated the concept of natural leadership in a 169-page work entitled *Banglar jamidar* (Chaitra 1320). This criticises absentee landlordism, but still praises the permanent settlement to the skies.

mischievous, either local zamindars or zamindari servants are at the bottom of the mischief."[311]

General statements about the role of zamindars in the swadeshi movement are somewhat hazardous, since the category was an omnibus one, extending from the very rich and influential maharajas lionised by Calcutta society down to the obscure tenure-holder with just a niche in the vast permanent settlement hierarchy, living on his land, unknown outside his locality, and yet perhaps the key person in his own village. It seems clear from the available evidence that barring a few major exceptions (like Brojendrakishore Raychaudhuri in Mymensingh or Narendralal Khan and Digambar Nanda in Midnapur),[312] the really vital part in promoting swadeshi in the countryside was played not by big zamindars (many of whom in any case were absentees, living most of the year in Calcutta) but by the far more numerous small landholders—talukdars and possessors of intermediate tenurial rights. Such tenures were the real basis of the predominantly Hindu 'middle class' bhadralok community. The ranks of the mufassil pleaders, doctors, school-teachers and zamindari amlas were largely drawn from such holders of intermediate tenures, and the following section on organisation will indicate the close links between the volunteer movement and these social strata. At present we are concerned with the ways in which the landlords among them helped to extend and enforce the boycott in the countryside. Apart from exploiting the general influence enjoyed traditionally by the landholding babu over his chasha tenant or sharecropper, the most potent weapon of all was the closure of the local markets (hats) to bideshi goods.

In Barisal, Aswinikumar Dutt in the early days of the

[311] Conduct of the Zamindars of Gauripur in Connection with the Political Agitation in the Mymensingh District. Home Political Progs A, February 1908, n. 102-3.

[312] For a discussion of the role of big zamindars, cf. below, Chapter X.

boycott agitation wrote to the local zamindars, asking them to stop the sale of foreign goods in the hats within their estates.[313] An official report on the movement in this district emphasises the role of the zamindars—Upendranath Sen of Basanda, and the landholders of Bhowal, Amrajuri, Jalabari, Kowkhali, Golachipa, Khalaskati and Goila.[314] On 23 November 1906, the Fortnightly Report from Eastern Bengal and Assam states : "It is reported by the police that the boycott of foreign goods has been proclaimed in almost all the hats under the control of Hindu zamindars throughout the districts of Faridpur and Dacca."[315] "In the Harirampur and Rupgunj police stations of the Dacca district 19 markets are reported to have been closed by the owners to the sale of foreign goods", declares another official source in December 1906.[316] From Midnapur, it is reported that "the Raja of Narajole and the Zamindar of Malighati have prohibited the sale of imported salt, sugar and cloth in all their hats on penalty of fine and expulsion".[317] It may be argued that official sources were interested in overemphasising this factor of zamindari compulsion, since it fitted in neatly with the theory of nationalism being the work of a microscopic (and oppressive) minority. But nationalist newspapers also freely admit the importance of the zamindar in enforcing the boycott. Thus in Faridpur, we are told, swadeshi has been a great success due to the efforts of volunteers in the town and of "patriotic zamindars" in the interior—the zamindars of Bairashi, Manikdaha-Kristopur, Habeegunj, Rudrakar, Gopalpur and Hatbaria being specially mentioned. But Goalundo remains "the darkest spot... the local public are indignant but the zamindars are perfectly

313 Saratkumar Roy, *op. cit.*, p. 128.
314 R. Nathan's Note on the Swadesh Bandhab Samiti, *op. cit.*, Home Political Progs Deposit, April 1909, n. 2.
315 Home Public Progs A, December 1906, n. 311.
316 Abstract of Reports, Eastern Bengal and Assam...during first half of December 1906. Home Public Progs A, February 1907, n. 265.
317 Reports on the Anti-Partition and Swadeshi Movement in Bengal (7 September 1906), para 12. Home Public Progs B, October 1906, n.13.

apathetic while their local agents are suspected of bad faith"—and so apparently no one can do anything.[318] At Sripur village (Hooghly district), the *Bengalee* reports on May 1907, swadeshi has declined because the local zamindars (the Mustaphis) have stopped taking an interest in it.

As in the social boycott, the closing of hats and exertion of zamindari influence came to imply in practice a considerable degree of intimidation of the lower orders (in many East Bengal districts predominantly Muslim) of village society. In an ominously big proportion of the swadeshi cases, zamindari officials and Muslim vendors faced each other as accused and plaintiff—we may cite as instances the Narsingdi Salt Case of December 1905, the Rajbari Salt Case of the following month,[319] and the Narayangunj Case of June 1907.[320] The pressures exerted by zamindars in the case of swadeshi sometimes helped to bring into the foreground dormant class tensions. In the Uluberia Swadeshi Case of January 1906, Jotindranath Biswas (naib of the zamindar of Basantopur), charged with seizing and burning bilati cloth carried by Khatir Mallik, put up the interesting defence that the tenants had concocted the case because he had obtained rent enhancements for his employer and tried to attach and sell the lands of the defaulters. Biswas's plea was upheld, the magistrate stating that the false case was "an outcome of ill-feeling existing between the accused who was the naib of Basantopur and some Mandals of the village".[321] In a Tangail case (November 1907), a Muslim bargadar-tenant charged Janakinath Chaudhuri of

[318] "Swadeshi at Faridpur", *Bengalee*, 3 October 1906.

[319] At Narsingdi hat owned by one Lalit Babu, the dewan Rajkumar on 8 December 1905 allegedly prevented Sadhu Kulu, a Muslim vendor, from selling Liverpool salt. The ijaradar of Rajbari bazar was sentenced on 6 February 1906 for having assaulted two Muslim sellers of salt, and taken away their scales. *Swadeshi Cases* (1906).

[320] At Narayangunj, a zamindar's naib along with two others threw the salt and sugar carried by a Muslim vendor into the river. *Bande Mataram*, 21 June 1907.

[321] *Swadeshi Cases*, pp. 72-79. *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 21 February 1906.

having burnt his Manchester-made cloths and wrongfully confined him, with the intention of making him relinquish his lease.[322] One is reminded of Harish Kundu in Rabindranath's *Ghare-baire*, the oppressive zamindar turned swadeshi hero.[323]

British encouragement, mulla communal propaganda, individual acts of oppression in the name of swadeshi, the long-standing social gulf between Hindu bhadralok and Muslim chasha, and above all basic (if often dormant) class tension—all combined to bring about serious Muslim outbursts at Iswargunj, Comilla, Jamalpur and other places in 1906 and 1907.[324] The *Red Pamphlet* called on Muslims to withdraw their services to Hindus in what it proclaimed was to be a 'swajati' movement—a social boycott in reverse, in fact.[325] There was a stirring among Hindu lower castes too, particularly the Namasudras of Faridpur and Bakargunj, and here also the government of the new province encouraged such tendencies. As a Fortnightly Report of August 1907 delicately phrased it: "Another marked feature has been the evidence of awakening hopes after social and political advancement, among the lower castes of Hindus, who have testified that they consider the orders of government regarding the admittance to the public service of more members of communities, other than the high caste Hindu, as giving them their first chance of rising in public estimation."[326] In March 1908, a Namasudra Conference demanded "freedom of trade",[327] and by the summer of that year, Muslims and Namasudras of Barisal were reported to be buying foreign cloth and salt even where these

[322] *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 15 November 1907.

[323] R.R. VIII, pp. 238-39, 293.

[324] For a detailed account of these riots, and of Hindu-Muslim relations in general, cf. below Chapter VIII.

[325] The full text of this notorious pamphlet was printed in the *Bengalee* of 5 May 1907.

[326] Fortnightly Report, Eastern Bengal and Assam for the period ending 20 August 1907, No. 417C, 27 August 1907, para 5. Home Political Progs A, September 1907, n. 65.

[327] *Bengalee*, 20 March 1908.

were more expensive than their swadeshi equivalents.[328] The *Modern Review* of November 1909 stated that some Namasudras "have gone so far as to cease cultivating the lands of the higher class Hindu landholders as burga tenants; and in some places the Namasudras have formed a combination not to render any services to the upper classes of the Hindu community".[329]

Swadeshi leaders invariably attributed incidents like these to British machinations, and in fact there is ample evidence that officials made extremely skilful use of such developments. In the battle for the hats raging in the countryside, we do occasionally hear of direct official counterpressures. Madaripur salt merchants are threatened with cancellation of their warehouse licences if they do not bring in Liverpool salt;[330] a Barisal district magistrate thinks of setting up a bilati salt shop under official auspices at Pirozepur, and has to be pulled up by a hasty telegram from Simla;[331] and the proprietors of Baira Hat are asked for an explanation by the SDO of Munshigunj as to why bilati cloth was not being sold there.[332] But more common (and also much more effective) was the utilisation of lower-class agrarian discontent to bring to heel troublesome zamindars. The Bengal Tenancy Act Amendment (Act I of 1907) together with its counterpart passed some months later in the new province, represented a judicious combination of the carrot and the stick. The bait of sum-

328 Rabindranath, *Sadupay*, *Prabasi*, Sravana 1315 (July-August 1908); R.R. X, p. 522.

329 "What Can Be Done for the Namasudras", *Modern Review*, November 1909.

330 *Bengalee*, 23 December 1905.

331 Home Political Progs A, August 1907, n. 108, 109. The proposal was mentioned in the district magistrate's confidential diary for the week ending 29 June 1907. The Government of India "strongly deprecate" such direct official intervention in trade, stated telegram No. 1862 from the home secretary to the Government of Eastern Bengal and Assam on 22 July 1907.

332 *Sanjibani*, 26 September 1907—RNP(B) for week ending 5 October 1907.

mary procedures for rent-recovery (similar to those in use in the khas mahals) was held out, but only zamindars "approved" by local officials would enjoy the new privilege.[333] In February 1908, the SDO of Jamalpur was reported to be collecting information about the relations between Brojendrakishore Raychaudhuri and his tenants. "As a result of these enquiries Brojendra Babu's tenants have got it into their heads that he has somehow become an object of official displeasure... Those of the tenants who had agreed to pay an enhanced rent are now refusing to do so."[334]

Already in November 1906, an official report tells us that zamindars "in some cases...are afraid to appear before their tenants in definite opposition to government, lest this should endanger their collection of rents".[335] The riots of April-May 1907 brought about a significant "change of attitude" among "the great landholders of Mymensingh" and convinced them "of the imperative necessity for maintaining peace and order"—and there was a rush to present addresses to lieutenant-governor Hare when he visited the district in August.[336] The *Sandhya* of 19 August vividly describes some of the compulsions behind loyalism: "Thc suits for arrears of rent instituted by those zamindars in East Bengal who are zealous in the swadeshi cause fall through—they cannot realise their rents from their tenants.

[333] *Administration of Bengal under Andrew Fraser 1903-08.* Newspapers immediately attacked this dangerous power given to district officials to demarcate between "good" and "bad" zamindars as a blatant political move—e.g. *Barisal Hitaishi,* 18 November 1906, *Hitavadi,* 23 November 1906 (RNP(B) for week ending 1 December 1906) and *Sandhya,* 6 December 1906 (RNP(B) for week ending 15 December 1906).

[334] *Daily Hitavadi,* 11 February 1908—RNP(B) for week ending 15 February 1908.

[335] Fortnightly Report, Eastern Bengal and Assam, No. 133T, 23 November 1906, para 4. Home Public Progs A, December 1906, n. 311.

[336] Fortnightly Report, Eastern Bengal and Assam, for the period ending 6 August 1907, No. 359C, 12 August 1907. Home Political Progs A, September 1907, n. 44.

It was this which was induced Maharaja Surja Kanta to sign the loyalty Kabuliyat."[337] The zamindars in fact were faced with a choice between their rents and their patriotism—and the issue in the case of the majority was never really in doubt.

Thus once again we are confronted with what was the real Achilles' heel of the entire swadeshi movement—the failure to evolve a peasant programme. Swadeshi thought, so rich in other directions, was indeed amazingly meagre and timid when it approached questions of landlord-peasant relationships. In the discussion on the tenancy amendment bill, the *Sanjibani* of 20 December 1906 deplored the extension of the certificate procedure,[338] and the *Bengalee* printed a long letter (signed N.) detailing the grievances of raiyats—abwabs, arbitrary rent enhancements, passage of land into the hands of moneylenders and the abuses of bhaoli (produce-rent) in Bihar.[339] But on the floor of the Bengal legislative council, Bhupendranath Bose welcomed the summary procedure offered "as a landlord",[340] and Asutosh Chaudhuri concentrated his criticism on the provision for executive intervention in cases of illegal rent enhancement, arguing that "the tenant can surely get relief from a munshiff's court".[341] Both of them of course condemned the distinction sought to be drawn between good and bad zamindars. In the legislative council of the new province, Sitanath Roy strongly supported a similar bill, opposing only the proposed ban on informal compromises between zamindars and tenants. He demanded that "a definite attempt should be made to improve the position of the much maligned zamindars", since the tenants had been given more than enough in 1859.[342] The Indian Associa-

[337] RNP(B) for week ending 24 August 1907.
[338] RNP(B) for week ending 29 December 1906.
[339] "The Bengal Raiyat's Grievances", I-IV, *Bengalee*, 23-26 January 1907.
[340] *Ibid*, 11 November 1906.
[341] *Ibid*, 16 November 1906.
[342] *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 7 December 1907.

tion had championed the raiyats in the debates leading to the 1885 Act; but this time, in a memorandum signed by Surendranath, it criticised unnecessary government interference in landlord-tenant relations.[343]

Two newsitems, published in *Bengalee* within a fortnight of each other in May 1906, might serve as indices of the limits of nationalist thought on agrarian issues during our period. On 13 May, it was reported that Rabindranath and Surendranath Tagore in course of a visit to their zamindari at Shelaidaha had remitted large portions of rent due to the scarcity, and given loans to needy raiyats: the *Bengalee* raised the pertinent question—"Will other zamindars follow suit?" On 27 and 30 May was published the reply of the Muktagaccha zamindars (headed by Surjyakanta) to two petitions from Muslims of Kharaghari village (alleging the imposition of an abwab of 50 per cent) which the district magistrate had referred to them. This reply stated that "lately the ryots of this quarter have conceived an idea that their rents will be reduced and that their representations will be favourably considered by the government irrespective of their merits, and probably this idea has also induced them to file the said petition". The petitioners, the zamindars alleged, had failed to pay their legitimate rents regularly, and hence deserved no consideration whatsoever. The *Bengalee* found this reply "sufficientlv convincing"[344] and saw in the whole affair evidence as to how Fuller "has demoralised the Mussalman ryots of Mymensingh".[345] The issue of 30 May incidentally carried another item describing high rice prices in Mymensingh (from Rs 6 to Rs 6-4 a maund), as a result of which many—particularly Muslim raiyats—were in distress.

The class bias evident in such attitudes may have been caused partly by a desire to retain the support of the big and influential zamindars for the swadeshi cause; more im-

[343] *Bengalee*, 15 February 1907.
[344] *Ibid*, 30 May 1906.
[345] *Ibid*, 27 May 1906.

portant probably was the fact that the educated bhadralok who formed the backbone of the nationalist movement were very often holders of intermediate tenures, and thus had a stake of their own in the security of rentals. Perhaps the very extension of the movement into the mufassil helped to inhibit radical thought on agrarian questions, since the village bhadralok obviously had to depend more on land than the metropolitan intelligentsia among whom patriotic endeavours had been largely confined in earlier days. Thus the range of swadeshi politics came to be limited ultimately by the basic facts of the economic and social structure of Bengal.

Chapter VII

SWADESHI ORGANISATION—ASSOCIATIONS AND SAMITIS

I. Organisational Types

Associations, samitis and volunteer organisations proliferated in swadeshi Bengal in bewildering number and variety. Before attempting a districtwise survey of the samitis, it may be useful for the sake of clarity to establish a broad typology of swadeshi organisations in general—a classification which ideally should have some relation to the analysis of ideological trends attempted in a previous chapter.[1] Historians of the period have so far focused attention mainly on the two poles of mendicant political associations and terrorist secret societies.[2] Such a dichotomy may be valid enough for the period after 1908, but it does serious injustice to the com-

[1] Cf. Chapter II above.

[2] Thus Dr Bimanbehari Majumdar's *Indian Political Associations and Reform of Legislature* 1818-1917 (1965) draws a simple distinction between constitutional agitation and secret societies, and makes no mention at all of bodies like the Anti-Circular Society or the Swadesh Bandhab Samiti. Dr R. C. Majumdar in his *History of the Freedom Movement in India*, Volume II (1963) likewise assumes that the samitis were no more than "militant nationalist" secret societies in embryo; he devotes twenty pages (pp. 278-98) to the Anushilan Samiti, but there is not a single reference to the Swadesh Bandhab. As partial exceptions should be mentioned Haridas and Uma Mukherji's *India's Fight For Freedom* (1958) with its separate sections on the Anti-Circular Society and the Bande Mataram Sampraday; the detailed account of the Dawn Society given in *The Origins of the National Education Movement* (1957) by the same authors; and a few references to the strength and social composition of the samiti movement in Dr Amales Tripathi's *The Extremist Challenge* (1967), Chapter IV.

plexities of the preceding three or four years—which saw numerous organised efforts to promote selfhelp in economic and social life, and the development of samitis with a wide range of activities. Constructive swadeshi and volunteer organisation anticipated in fact much of later Gandhism. They represent the practical counterpart of the theoretical exercises of Rabindranath in his *Swadeshi samaj* and Aurobindo in the *Doctrine of Passive Resistance*.

At one end of the organisational spectrum we can easily place the older, moderate-led associations, engrossed—at least down to 1905—in drawing up memorials and protests on the particular grievance of the day mainly for the benefit of public opinion in England, and marked out also by the absence of anything like a full-time political cadre of volunteers. Given the nature of their activity—essentially sporadic and strictly constitutional—such bodies inevitably remained little more than loose associations of prominent and respectable gentlemen. In 1905 the three leading organisations of this type were the British Indian Association of the big zamindars, the Bengal Landholders' Association (a recent breakaway from the former) and the Indian Association.

Of these, the British Indian Association had become an almost purely loyalist body. Its leader Raja Pearymohun Mukherji had denounced the Congress at the association's annual meeting in June 1898 for subverting the authority of the natural leaders of the community.[3] It joined the agitation against Risley's scheme—after some hesitation, it seems[4]—and organised a conference on 20 January 1904;[5] Pearymohun also presided over the Town Hall meeting which

[3] The raja complained that "those whom God has vouchsafed the influence of example have lost all hold on the respect of the masses", due to the propaganda by "the irrepressible regiment of Congress patriots". He appealed to "the government to look about for a remedy". *Indian Mirror*, 18 August 1898.

[4] The *Indian Mirror* commented on 19 January 1904 that the British Indian Association was "at last" calling an all-Bengal conference. RNEP(B) for week ending 23 January 1904.

[5] *Bengalee*, 22 January 1904—RNEP(B) for week ending 30 January 1904.

followed two months later.[6] But the association took little interest in the movement after 1905, and by August 1907 we find its secretary Prodyotkumar Tagore busy organising a loyalist manifesto.[7]

More surprising is the relative unimportance of Surendranath's Indian Association in swadeshi politics. It of course took a leading part in organising a whole series of Town Hall protest meetings;[8] its office at 62 Bowbazar Street was a favourite meeting-place and housed also the Indian Stores; and Prithwischandra Ray, secretary of its 'political and economic section', informed the public in December 1905 that the association had been the sole medium for carrying out "Congress political work" in Bengal for the last eight months.[9] It is not unfair to add, however, that the "work" referred to probably amounted to precious little. What is significant is that the Indian Association never tried to organise a volunteer force of its own, and thus evidently failed to move with the times. We find even Surendranath maintaining contact with the young men of Calcutta mainly through new organisations like the Students' Union or the Anti-Circular Society; the Indian Association more and more fell into the background.

The Bengal Landholders' Association under its energetic secretary Asutosh Chaudhuri (leading barrister and Pabna zamindar) seems to have been much more active and prominent. The campaign against Risley's partition plan started with a conference organised by this association on 17 December 1903.[10] In June 1904 Asutosh Chaudhuri created

[6] Prithwischandra Ray, *The Case Against the Break-up of Bengal* (September 1905), Appendix C.

[7] Diary of Political Events, 1907, Home Political Progs Deposit, March 1908, n. 1.

[8] 18 March 1904, 10 January 1905, 10 March 1905 (to protest against Curzon's convocation address), 7 August 1905, 22 September 1905, 31 January 1906.

[9] *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 9 December 1905.

[10] Report on the Agitation against the Partition of Bengal—Govern-

a sensation at the Burdwan provincial conference by his call for selfreliance and condemnation of political mendicancy.[11] The rejection of old methods was perhaps not meant to be taken too literally; in November 1904 Rameschandra Dutt complained to Gokhale—"They are not even true to their theories: A. Chaudhuri who headed them now asks me to do all I can to get up *agitation* in England about the Bengal partition! Then why did he talk about the uselessness of agitation?"[12] But the Landholders' Association after July 1905 did take considerable interest in promoting swadeshi enterprise and national education. The decision to set up the National Council of Education was taken at the conference held at the association office on 16 November 1905, following a circular letter issued by Asutosh Chaudhuri two days before.[13] At the annual conferences of the association in February 1906 and March 1907, the secretary related with pride the organisation's role in setting up the Bangalakshmi Cotton Mills, establishing weaving schools in the mufassil and starting a swadeshi insurance concern.[14] Not unexpectedly, however, the Landholders' Association consistently kept aloof from extremist politics. After the Muzaffarpur incident, it hastened to make its bow to authority with a statement condemning anarchism on 5 May 1908;[15] its counterpart in the new province followed suit with a loyalist address to the lieutenant-governor.[16] By 1914, the association

ment of Bengal to Government of India (Home) No. 205 P, 25 January 1906, para 4. Home Public Progs A, June 1906, n. 175.

[11] *Sanjibani*, 16 Asar 1311 (30 June 1904).

[12] R. C. Dutt to G. K. Gokhale, 26 November 1904—Gokhale Papers, Reel No. 4.

[13] Haridas and Uma Mukherji, *Origins of the National Education Movemcnt* (1957), pp. 35-39.

[14] *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 26 February 1906; *Bengalee*, 19 March 1907.

[15] Diary of Political Events, 1908, Home Political Progs Deposit, March 1909, n. 1.

[16] Sir Charles Bayley (officiating lieutenant-governor, E. Bengal and

had become as dormant a body as the British Indian; there was little contact any longer with mufassil landlords, meetings were poorly attended and the whole organisation, we are told, had become the preserve of a few titled zamindars.[17]

Apart from the Calcutta societies, there were political bodies—of a sort—in many district towns too, at times loosely affiliated to the Indian Association. Down to 1905 these meant usually no more than tiny groups of elderly local bigwigs, drawn mostly from the legal profession, quite inactive for most of the year except when choosing delegates from among themselves for the Congress or the provincial conference.[18] We hear of many such bodies during the earlier days of the movement. The mufassil campaign against the Risley proposals in the winter of 1903-4 was organised by the Dacca People's Association led by Anandachandra Roy and the Mymensingh Association headed by Anathbandhu Guha —both local pleaders.[19] In July and August 1905, newspapers tell us of the 'people's associations' of Bagerhat, Kishoregunj and Tangail, the Murshidabad Association at Berhampore and the Rajshahi Association at Ghoramara[20] holding protest meetings, electing delegates for the 7 August Town Hall rally and (at Bagerhat and perhaps even earlier at Kishoregunj[21]) endorsing the *Sanjibani's* call for boycott quite some days before other Calcutta leaders and newspapers. But then most of these quietly faded out, giving place to

Assam) to Pinhey (viceroy's private secretary), 25 July 1908. Letters and Telegrams from Persons in India, July-December 1908—Minto Papers, Reel No. 3, M. 983.

17 Bamacharan Majumdar, *Banglar jamidar* (Zamindars) (1914).

18 Cf. Pal's scathing comments on such mufassil "rings of lawyers"—*Bande Mataram*, 17 September 1906.

19 *Dacca Prakash*, 27 December 1903—RNP(B) for week ending 2 February 1904, Government of Bengal to Government of India No. 2556J of 6 April 1904, Enclosure 19 (note from Mymensingh district magistrate No. 169J of 5 February 1904)—Home Public Progs A, February 1905, n. 157.

20 *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 20 July 1905; *Bengalee*, 21 July, 25 July, 1 August and 3 August 1905.

21 The call was endorsed by the Bagerhat People's Association meeting of 16 July 1905 (*Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 20 July 1905) and the claim

the more virile samitis of younger men.

Perhaps the course of events in Barisal may be taken as more or less typical. Here there had been a people's association from the 1880s led by the local pleader Pyarilal Roy, which thanks to Aswinikumar Dutt had already distinguished itself in certain rather unusual directions—as for instance by the attempt to start some village branches and the collection of 40,000 signatures from the district in 1887 praying for elected legislatures.[22] When the boycott movement began, two committees were set up in Barisal—a Netri-Sangha (Association of Leaders) of elderly zamindars and lawyers and an eighteen-member Karmi-Sangha (Association of Workers) of younger teachers and pleaders led at first by Dr Nishikanta Basu. Aswinikumar at first formally belonged to the first group, but when the elders got discredited by allowing themselves to be browbeaten by Fuller in November 1905 he left the Netri-Sangha (which soon disappeared) and openly took his place as the leader of the activist group—which meanwhile had blossomed out into the Swadesh Bandhab Samiti.[23] The samiti drew its recruits largely from the staff and students of the Brojomohan Institution, among whom Aswinikumar had already organised several societies for volunteer social work.

The pre-Gandhian Congress, along with the Bengal provincial conference modelled upon it, as is well-known, never became a real political party with local branches and a re-

for precedence of this Khulna town is accepted by Haridas and Uma Mukherji, who quite rightly reject Surendranath's statement attributing the honour to Pabna—*India's Fight For Freedom* (1958), p. 219. But the *Bande Mataram* of 30 July 1907 categorically gave the credit to Kishoregunj—"All honour to Kishoregunj to whom it was given to be the spokesman of Bengal"—editorial entitled "Why the Boycott Succeeded". Presumably it knew what it was talking about. The *Bengalee* of 21 July 1905 mentions a meeting of the Kishoregunj People's Association on 14 July, but gives no details. The same newspaper on 25 April 1906 credits Kishoregunj with having started the boycott three weeks before 7 August—this, it declares, is "a little known fact".

[22] Saratkumar Roy, *Mahatma Aswinikumar* (1926), pp. 103-4, 116.

[23] *Ibid*, pp. 124-28.

gular membership. It remained always little more than an annual conference, organised by a small "inner circle" of leaders maintaining contact through private correspondence.[24] What is not usually remembered, however, is that a serious attempt was made in Bengal between 1906 and 1908 to set up relatively stable district organisations with definite programmes of regular work. Resolution XVI of the Calcutta Congess (1906) recommended the setting-up of provincial Congress committees which should devote "special care to organise district associations throughout the Province for sustained and continuous political work. . ."[25] Such a provincial committee was actually set up at the Berhampore conference three months later,[26] and though this seems to have remained mainly on paper, an official report notes in May 1907 that "as a result of the recent Berhampore Conference, a movement has been set on foot for the formation of district associations to watch the social and political requirements of the district".[27] District conferences have become "the order of the day" in Bengal, stated the *Bengalee* editorially on 22 April 1908.

There were such conferences for the districts of Barisal (August 1906, August 1908), Comilla (February 1907, April 1908), Rajshahi and Rangpur (April 1907), Mymensingh (April 1907, April 1908), Khulna (May 1907), Jessore and Pabna (June 1907), 24-Parganas (July 1907), Hooghly (September 1907), Bogra and Midnapur (December 1907), Birbhum (February 1908), Faridpur (March 1908) and Chittagong (April 1908). District associations were also set

[24] Cf. Dr Bimanbihari Majumder, "The Inner Circle of the Congress in the pre-Gandhian Era"—*The Quarterly Review of Historical Studies*, 1965-66, No. 1. The private papers of G. K. Gokhale and G. S. Khaparde recently acquired by the National Archives of India should be illuminating in this context, particularly the voluminous correspondence between Gokhale, Wacha and Wedderburn.

[25] Annie Besant, *How India Wrought for Freedom* (1915), pp. 462-63.

[26] *Swaraj*, 24 Chaitra 1313 (April 1907).

[27] Fortnightly Report from Bengal, No. 1033 P.D., 25 May 1907, para 5 —Home Public Progs A, June 1907, n. 220.

up in Dacca (February 1907) and Calcutta (October 1907). There were even a few conferences at the subdivisional or pargana levels—as at Madaripur in Faridpur (March 1907), Bhusna-Muhammadpur in Jessore (April 1907), Tangail in Mymensingh (May 1907), Bagerhat in Khulna (June 1907), and Rampurhat in Birbhum (April 1908).[28]

Except in Barisal, Comilla, Mymensingh (the 1908 conference at Kishoregunj, where Aurobindo delivered a famous speech)[29] and Midnapur (where there was an open split), most of these conferences and district associations seem to have been dominated by moderates. The *Amrita Bazar Patrika* on 20 April 1907 commented rather sourly on two regular features of the district conferences—the presence of Surendranath and the reception accorded to him. But the moderates kept their position only by going a long way with the tide, at least in words, and most of the conferences adopted resolutions calling for selfhelp and sustained social and political work through village associations. There was a chance at one time that such a programme of constructive work could keep the Bengal nationalists united even after Surat. In February 1908, the Pabna provincial conference decided to set up a permanent committee consisting of Rabindranath, Surendranath, Motilal Ghosh, Jogeschandra Chaudhuri and Hirendranath Dutta with three salaried secretaries appointed by it, to promote swadeshi industries and agriculture, national education and arbitration courts, cooperative banks, dharmagolas (community grain stores) and sanitation measures in the villages.[30] The Kennedy murders and the wave of repression which followed it frustrated what might have been an interesting

[28] The facts and the dates are from relevant issues of the *Bengalee*, the *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, and the *Bande Mataram* checked in some cases by the Diary of Political Events 1907—Home Political Progs Deposit, March 1908, n. 1.

[29] *Palli samiti* (village associations)—Sri Aurobindo, *Speeches* (1922, 1948).

[30] Resolutions of the Bengal Provincial Conference at Pabna, included in Home Political Progs A, March 1909, n. 10-11.

development. The programmes adopted by the district conferences also remained mostly on paper, except where there was already a samiti organisation to carry it into effect—and such samitis generally were dominated by men with extremist leanings. Elsewhere the developments probably followed the Pabna pattern—a month after the district conference, we are told, "there is no longer any talk about swadeshi and boycott, nor is there any attempt on the part of our lawyer-leaders to give effect to the various social, industrial and political resolutions said to have been unanimously passed in the conference".[31]

Constructive swadeshi found more serious and sincere advocates among certain individuals and groups, of whom Satischandra Mukherji and Rabindranath Tagore were the most outstanding. The organisations which such men sought to build up were distinguished by their involvement in definite programmes of work round the year, and by their relative aloofness from active politics whether of the moderate or of the extremist variety. The work of some of these bodies has been described in previous chapters—the Indian Industrial Association, set up as early as 1891; the more active Association for the Advancement of Scientific and Industrial Education, started by Jogendrachandra Ghosh in 1904;[32] and the National Council of Education.[33]

In 1895, Satischandra Mukherji had started a small Bhagabat Chatuspathi to impart religious instruction along orthodox Hindu lines to a select number of students (about twenty in 1899).[34] This served as a kind of precursor to the Dawn Society established in July 1902, which had the broader purpose of providing a system of religious, moral and intellectual training for the elite among Calcutta college and university students. There were lectures for the

[31] *Pabna Notes*, dated 27 July—*Bande Mataram*, 3 August 1907.

[32] Cf. above, Chapter III.

[33] Cf. above, Chapter IV.

[34] Haridas and Uma Mukherji, *op. cit.*, pp. 195-99. "Third Report of the Bhagabat Chatuspathi, a free Hindu Religious Institution"—*Dawn*, June 1899.

members twice a week, regular discussion meetings and occasional talks by distinguished guests; the students were also expected to keep record books for inspection by the secretary. A little later (June 1903), an 'industrial section' was set up, and from September 1904 a 'magazine section' took over charge of the periodical *Dawn*. The membership, divided into several categories, totalled about sixty in 1905; the names included some which were to become very well-known indeed later on in many different spheres of life —Benoykumar Sarkar, Rabindranarayan Ghosh, Pramathanath Banerji, Upendranath Ghoshal—and Rajendraprasad.[35] The concentration on an elite and the emphasis upon intellectual training—as distinct from physical culture—sharply demarcate the Dawn Society from most of the samitis of the swadeshi age. Despite Satischandra's personal connections with many extremist leaders, it is worth noting that the library of the society at first excluded political journals,[36] and that its permanent president Nagendranath Ghosh was a moderate of the mildest possible hue. Satischandra and his pupils played a notable part in propagating the message of industrial swadeshi; they provided the steel-frame of the Bengal National College in its earliest days—and yet it may be hazarded that the group was a bit too high-brow to have really occupied as central a place in the swadeshi movement as has been assigned them by certain recent historians.

In his famous *Swadeshi samaj* address of July 1904, and again at a Town Hall meeting on 25 August 1905,[37] Rabindranath Tagore had pleaded eloquently for all-round efforts to promote selfhelp in the countryside through the revival of the traditional village community or samaj—about which at this time he seems to have had a somewhat idyllic and

[35] "System of Work and Training under Dawn Society"—*Dawn*, December 1902. Haridas and Uma Mukherji, *op. cit.*, Part II, Chapter 3, in particular pp. 276-81.

[36] *Dawn*, December 1902.

[37] *Abastha o byabastha* (The Situation and the Remedy)—R.R.III. *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 26 August 1905.

romanticised conception.[38] In 1905 an attempt was made to make this programme more concrete. One of the chief organisers of the Bangiya Sahitya Parisad, Byomkesh Mustafi, tried to work out a detailed blue-print for the constitution of a swadeshi samaj; the intention was to print this plan and then set up a kind of pilot-project in a selected area. Even Barindrakumar Ghosh's group of young revolutionaries was attracted for a brief while by Rabindranath's scheme, and interested enough to send a few of its representatives to talk things over with the poet.[39] It seems not unlikely that the programme for a palli-samaj later reproduced by Hemendraprasad Ghosh in his history of the Congress[40] was the outcome of the efforts of Byomkesh Mustafi and those working with him. This document bears the clear stamp of Tagore's ideas. A committee of five would be chosen by the inhabitants of each village to promote swadeshi arts and crafts, set up schools, gymnasia and dispensaries, and undertake drainage, irrigation and road-construction projects. There would be pro-

[38] As Prithwischandra Ray in a critique of the *Swadeshi samaj* had pointed out with a fair amount of logic—"Swadeshi samaj—Byadhi o chikishta" (Swadeshi Samaj—the Disease and the Cure) —*Prabasi*, Sravana 1311 (1904).

[39] Dr Bhupendranath Dutta tells us of this interesting episode in his *Bharater dwitiya swadhinata sangram* (3rd ed., 1949), pp. 157-58. At Barindrakumar's request, Bhupendranath some time in 1905 wrote to Tagore stating the unwillingness of young men like him to accept Surendranath Banerji's leadership, and expressing the desire to work together with the poet. Rabindranath invited him to Jorasanko and then requested him to talk things over with Surendranath Tagore—a case of "bringing coal to Newcastle", says Bhupendranath, as the poet's nephew himself was then in the revolutionary society. A little later, Bhupendranath had a talk also with Byomkesh Mustafi at the Sahitya Parisad office. Annada Kaviraj of the revolutionary party attended a subsequent meeting called by Rabindranath to discuss the swadeshi samaj plan. Not surprisingly, however, the cooperation between Rabindranath and the men of the *Yugantar* and Manıktala Gardens proved shortlived and abortive.

[40] Hemendraprasad Ghosh. *Congress* (in Bengali) (1920, 1921), pp. 163-66.

vision also for arbitration courts, model farms and dharmagolas to fight famine; and a machinery would be set up to collect information about all aspects of the life of the villages. Significantly enough, there is no mention of the boycott or for that matter of any kind of direct political activity (except for a vaguely-worded general pledge to support the aims and programmes of the Congress and provincial and district conferences).

Rabindranath's repeated pleas for constructive 'nonpolitical' village work—the most passionate of these being the presidential address at the Pabna provincial conference—met with little response, as is well-known, from political leaders whether of the 'old' or 'new' variety. The poet perforce had to confine his efforts to his own zamindari, scattered over the three districts of Pabna, Rajshahi and Nadia. Even before 1905, he had set up an arbitration system at Shilaidaha (in Nadia) and Kaligram (Rajshahi district). Petty disputes were settled by the pradhan of each village chosen by the inhabitants themselves, while more serious civil cases went up to the pancha-pradhans of the pargana elected by the village pradhans. The final court of appeal was Rabindranath himself—zamindari officials were excluded, though records were still kept with their help. Faujdari (criminal) cases, however, were still tackled by the official courts, and thus the system did not involve any direct violation of the law of the land.[41]

From about 1908 onwards, efforts were made to implement also the other aspects of Tagore's village reconstruction programme. Kaligram pargana became the main centre; this was divided into three sections, with a Hitaishi Sabha consisting of the village pradhans in each, and a general committee for the whole area in which there was one representative of the zamindar. The annual income of the sabha—derived from a cess on the rent at the rate of 3 pice per rupee—totalled more than Rs 5000, and generous

[41] Rathindranath Tagore, *Pitri-smriti* (Reminiscences of My Father) (1966), pp. 42, 242-43.

contributions were made also by the zamindar himself.[42] The achievements were considerable—three free health centres, more than two hundred primary schools (as well as night schools for adult education), numerous public works, and a rural bank to fight moneylenders in which Tagore invested his Nobel Prize (and lost the principal entirely when the bank failed in the 1930s).[43] During the swadeshi upsurge itself, we hear of a Cooperative Swadeshi Samaj being set up by the poet's nephew Suren Tagore at Kushtia (near the Shilaidaha estate);[44] and a training centre for handloom weaving was established at the same place.[45] Rathindranath on his return from the USA ran a model farm for some years at Shilaidaha, complete with a soil-research laboratory and other techniques of scientific agriculture.[46] Meanwhile from about 1907 onwards village reconstruction efforts had been started also at Bhubandanga by the teachers and students of Santiniketan[47]—work which was to blossom forth later in the form of Sriniketan.

Contact with village reality helped to dissipate Rabindranath's romantic illusions regarding the virtues of the traditional Hindu samaj. In a letter to Monorajan Bandopadhyay dated 30 Asar 1315 (July 1908), we find the explicit recognition that the nature of caste-ridden Hindu society—as distinct from the Muslim—was hindering at every step efforts at collective selfhelp in Shilaidaha. "Having seen all this at first hand, I no longer feel any desire to 'idealise' the Hindu samaj through delusions pleasant to the ear but ultimately suicidal"[48]—a big contrast indeed to the

[42] *Ibid*, p. 244.

[43] *Ibid.*, pp. 245-51. Also Atul Sen—one of Tagore's assistants at Kaligram—who has given a detailed account of the work being carried on there in 1915-16, *Palli-prakriti* (Visvabharati, 1962), pp. 250-54.

[44] *Bengalee*, 22 September 1905.

[45] *Ibid*, 21 November 1905, 7 April 1906.

[46] Rathindranath Tagore, *op. cit.*, pp. 246-47.

[47] *Palli-prakriti*, pp. 225-26. Account of Jatindranath Mukhopadhyay.

[48] *Ibid*, p. 227. The same realisation found vivid expression in *Gora* (cf. particularly Chapter 67), written between 1907 and 1909.

Swadeshi Samaj of just four years before. The other illusion was not unnaturally more persistent—that of the benevolent zamindar (a la Tagore himself) being anything more than a very atypical phenomenon, and the consequent absence of any real programme of major social change through agrarian reform. Yet even here the Soviet visit of 1930 was to bring a new awareness—"Today I feel ashamed of this whole business of zamindari... My sorrow is that I have been brought up from childhood as a parasite... The time is coming for a fundamental change in our way of life. Let me be able to accept it with good grace and without regrets..."[49] The commitment of this extraordinary man to progressive causes only deepened with age.

Efforts to promote village organisations were by no means confined to Tagore, though these other schemes generally had somewhat closer connection with politics. As already noted, such plans could provide a common ground for men with otherwise widely divergent political creeds. Aswinikumar Dutt[50] and Jatindranath Raychaudhuri,[51] Aurobindo[52] and Surendranath[53] and Aswinicoomar Banerji,[54] all agreed

[49] Letter to Rathindranath Tagore, 31 October 1930, *Ibid*, p. 269.

[50] Aswinikumar emphasised the need for arbitration courts in the villages—speech at the Barisal provincial conference, April 1906, reprinted in Priyanath Guha, *Yojna-bhanga* (September 1907), Appendix, pp. 1-14.

[51] Presidential address at the first 24-Parganas district conference, Barasat, 20 July 1907—Jatindranath Roychaudhuri MA BL (zamindar, Taki), *A Few Observations on the Present Situation* (September 1907), pp. 38-50.

[52] Speech on the palli samaj resolution at Mymensingh district conference, Kishoreganj, April 1908—Sri Aurobindo, *Speeches* (1922, 1948), pp. 50-58.

[53] "After his return from England last year Surendranath Banerji in all his speeches advocated the formation of district, subdivisional and village societies..." D.O. 3762 SD, 4/1024A, Calcutta, 9 May 1910, from F. C. Daly (inspector-general of police, Bengal) to A. B. Barnard (deputy director, criminal intelligence). Pamphlets regarding the formation of village and district Associations in Bengal—Home Political Progs Deposit, July 1910, n. 3.

[54] Presidential address at Nadia district conference, November 1909. *Nayak*, 11 Agrahayan 1316.

in emphasising the need for palli samitis. Resolutions of this type remained a stock feature of provincial and district conferences even in the closing stages of the swadeshi movement, at a time when such assemblies had once again become the close preserve of moderates;[55] and yet pamphlets calling for village associations of an at least superficially similar kind were found by the police in searches made in connection with the Nangla swadeshi dacoity.[56]

The very interesting home department file entitled "Pamphlets regarding formation of village and district associations in Bengal"[57] contains the text of four such brochures. The first of these, entitled *Swadeshi mandali,* is without date or press-line; it envisages an elaborate three-tier structure of village mandalis, district councils and a central council for the whole of Bengal. Initially the organisation is to be built up from top downwards, with the Calcutta Mandali choosing the first central council, and with district leaders empowered to set up village units. But the ultimate ideal is "a strictly representative" system, with the village as the basic unit and elections every three years. Public works, mass education, arbitration and other items of constructive swadeshi are all included in the programme; a less conventional objective is "to organise guilds and unions of various trades, classes and professions". There is an explicit reference also to "the true ideal of national selfgovernment". The link with politics—in contrast to Rabindranath's schemes—

[55] As examples we may cite (i) Resolution XI of the Faridpur provincial conference, September 1911, calling for arbitration courts, sanitation measures and demonstration farms in villages—Home Political Progs B, October 1911, n. 112-13. (ii) Resolutions III-IV of the third annual conference of the 24-Parganas zilla samiti. Behala. January 1910, dealing with water supply, arbitration courts, primary education and malaria prevention. Copy of resolutions preserved in *Private Papers of Surjyakumar Ghoshal.*

[56] D. O. No. 9074-SB, Calcutta 8 December 1909, from F. C. Daly to F. W. Duke (chief secretary, government of Eastern Bengal and Assam)—Home Political Progs Deposit, July 1910, n. 3.

[57] Home Political Progs Deposit, July 1910, n. 3.

is evident also in the pamphlet *24-Parganas Zilla Samiti/ Prospectus No.* 3 (Sravana 1315), which starts with an essay urging boycott by Srikali Ghosh. Surendranath and Jatindranath Raychaudhuri are named as the principal office-bearers of this association, which proved more stable than most of its sister organisations, and survived to hold its third annual conference in January 1910.[58] *The Rules of the Khulna Zilla Samiti, Mahakuma Samiti and Palli Samiti,* said to have been drawn up on 23 Jaistha 1315 (June 1908), lays special emphasis upon the close connection between the village association and the extremist volunteer movement. Village volunteers are required to meet "at least once a fortnight to discuss politics, political economy, swadeshi, boycott and all other topics beneficial to the country and with a view to popular instruction there shall be read and discussed newspapers and *Desher katha* and such like books". Much less avowedly political, however, are the *Rules of the Mahakuma Samiti and Palli Samiti/Satkhira* (1316-1909)); though mainly a rehash of the Khulna rules, all references to volunteers have been deleted here, and the ideal is stated to be "selfgovernment under British supremacy". No doubt the new caution is to be attributed largely to the ban on the samitis in January 1909.

As in so much else in those times, there was a very wide gap between promise and performance, and we are not really surprised to learn that anxious police inquiries instituted after the seizure of these pamphlets soon discovered that the concrete achievements had been negligible. Thus in the 24-Parganas, attempts to set up village samitis, at Srichandra Hat and Fatehpur, had been blocked easily enough by the local authorities. Another such samiti was reported from Uttarpara—and that was about all.[59] Of course, this was in 1910, at the fag-end of the swadeshi mo-

[58] Cf. Note 55 above.

[59] D.O. 3762/4/1024A SD, Calcutta, 9 May 1910, F.C. Daly to A. B. Barnard—Home Political Progs Deposit, July 1910, n. 3.

vement—there is some evidence of greater success in earlier years. Newspaper reports in early 1907 tell us of arbitration courts and "swadeshi village panchayets" functioning in places as obscure as Dholghat and Suchakanadandi in Chittagong[60] and Naogaon in Rajshahi.[61] In April 1907, a pamphlet by Umakanta Hazari brought out by the Samta Swadeshi Samiti (in Jessore district) contained a whole chapter on "The Formation of Swadeshi Samitis".[62] Here the author does not confine himself to giving a plan of his own (on the familiar lines of a three-tier structure, village, district and provincial) on village organisation; he claims to have collected "lists of more than a thousand such samitis, their names and constitutions", and states village samitis to have become particularly numerous in the districts of Barisal, Faridpur, Mymensingh and Tippera.[63] The importance of these four districts is corroborated by many other sources, and was of course not accidental—it was in this region that the samiti movement attained its greatest strength. Without the backing of these ubiquitous samitis of enthusiastic young volunteers, moderate political associations and plans for constructive swadeshi alike tended to wither away.

The best contemporary analysis of the origins of the samitis—certainly the most significant organisational contribution of the swadeshi age—was made by Aurobindo in a speech at Howrah in 1909.[64] The samitis,—"the glory of our national life for the last three years",[65] sprang, he said, from

[60] *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 14 January 1907.

[61] *Bengalee*, 21 March 1907.

[62] Umakanta Hazari, *Banga-jagoran o swadesher nana-katha* (Awakening of Bengal and Swadeshi Miscellany). The Samta Swadeshi Samiti, Jadavpur, Jessore, 5 April 1907, Chapter VI (Swadeshi Samiti Gathan).

[63] *Ibid*, p. 61.

[64] The Right of Association—speech at annual meeting of the Howrah People's Association. Reprinted from *Karmayogin*, Numbers 4, 6, 7, July-August 1909—Sri Aurobindo, *Speeches* (1948).

[65] *Ibid*, p. 126.

three roots. There were firstly the young men working as volunteers at Congress or provincial conference sessions, initially on a purely temporary basis. Then there were the associations for social service for helping the poor and the sick—"That was what Swami Vivekananda preached. That was what Aswini Kumar Dutt strove to bring into organised existence."[66] We may add in parentheses here that in an article written about two months before the beginning of the boycott movement, Bepinchandra Pal had suggested that the volunteers engaged for conferences should be converted into regular bodies and employed in work round the year on the model of the Barisal students.[67] Finally Aurobindo mentioned the "physical culture societies", without going into details for obvious reasons. The reference clearly is to the efforts of Sarala Debi and of Aurobindo's own emissaries from Baroda, Jatindranath Bandyopadhyay and Barindrakumar Ghosh. The three streams came together for a time after July 1905; the great new stimulus being of course the need for volunteers to picket shopkeepers sticking to bideshi, hawk swadeshi goods from door to door, propagate the new nationalist gospel and enforce the 'social boycott' of recalcitrant elements. The Comilla and Jamalpur riots of early 1907 came as another stimulus, powerful yet ultimately perhaps somewhat unfortunate, with many samitis springing up as selfdefence organisations of the Hindus. Even in Midnapore, far away from the riots, a contemporary report tells us that 'akharas' (gymnasia) were first set up in large numbers "just after Bengal was roused to the absolute necessity of self-defence by the unparalleled barbarities in Jamalpur and other places perpetrated by appointed gundas".[68]

As distinct from pre-1905 moderate associations, the samitis sought to build up a full-time political cadre, and made arrangements also for their intellectual, moral and physical training. The various items in the constructive

[66] *Ibid*, p. 125.
[67] Bepinchandra Pal, "Amader volunteer-dal" (Our Volunteers), *Bhandar*, Jaistha 1312 (May-June 1905).
[68] *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 31 October 1907.

swadeshi programme—encouragement of indigenous industries, national schools, social service, village reconstruction—were taken up with enthusiasm by many of the samitis, and yet their primary orientation was towards politics, usually (though there were exceptions) of the extremist variety. In neither organisation nor function were the samitis entirely uniform, as indeed was to be expected in a movement springing from such different roots. Some concentrated on peaceful mass work, on spreading the swadeshi message to the remotest villages; the Swadesh Bandhab of Barisal may be taken to be the best representative of this variety. Such bodies could afford to have a relatively loose and fairly democratic organisation, and physical training formed only a minor part in their programme. A report issued on behalf of the Swadesh Bandhab Samiti in the second half of 1907 confessed : "A gymnasium on a small scale was opened at one time, but for want of a permanent instructor and for want of funds this most important work is not being done."[69] In sharp and significant contrast stood the Dacca Anushilan, with its iron discipline, conspiratorial oaths and organisation, and orientation towards military training and revolutionary activity from the very beginning.[70] There were revolutionary inner circles within many of the other samitis too from an early date—but it needs to be emphasised that terrorism did not become the sole or even the major form of activity of most of these organisations till 1908 or 1909. As late as July 1909, an official report on the "national volunteers" in Eastern Bengal and Assam admitted that "So far we have no evidence of bombs or explosives having been used by volunteers in this province" and that "no seizures of firearms have been made"; four swadeshi dacoities and an attempt on the district magistrate of Dacca (Allen) comprised virtually all the evidence of overt

[69] History of the second year of the Swadeshi Movement (22 Sravana 1313-14). Supplementary Report on Samitis in the Backergunj District, p. 24—Home Political Progs Deposit, July 1909, n. 13.
[70] For details, cf. below, Chapter VII, sec. 4.

terrorism till then.[71] The conventional stereotype of the samiti of the swadeshi age as revolutionary secret society in embryo thus involves a serious anachronism.

The samitis appeared first in Calcutta during the early months of the boycott agitation. A police report dated 25 January 1906 lists fourteen "Clubs and Societies" in the city "concerned in the present Swadeshi movement".[72] Students of every district of Bengal came to study in Calcutta, and no doubt it was through them above all that the movement initially spread into the mufassil. But soon the metropolis was surpassed by the districts of East Bengal. In the new province, "the volunteers were not much in evidence till the year 1906", but by 1907, "with the exception of Sibsagar, Goalpara and the Garo Hills, every district had its volunteer organisation".[73] Official reports give us some interesting information regarding the strength and social composition of the volunteer movement in East Bengal.

A 1909 police report says that "the volunteer movement in the province received considerable support from wealthy zamindars and the native gentry of the province. Parents, when the movement first started, encouraged their sons to join as volunteers in the service of the 'Motherland'." They also gave financial aid, "and there are strong reasons to believe many of the firearms carried by volunteers are lent by persons exempted or possessing licensed weapons". "There are indications, however, that the volunteer movement is not now receiving such liberal support", states this report of July 1909 in conclusion.[74]

[71] Report on 'National Volunteers' in Eastern Bengal and Assam up to the end of April 1909, submitted to the government of India on 23 July 1909, pp. 5, 24-30. Home Political Progs Deposit, August 1909, n. 26.
[72] Enclosure H, pp. 105-6, to Report on the Agitation Against the Partition of Bengal—government of Bengal to government of India No. 205-P, 25 January 1906. Home Public Progs A, June 1906, n. 175.
[73] Home Political Progs Deposit, August 1909, n. 26, p. 4.
[74] *Ibid*, p. 5.

wordly ties for the samiti".[81] Students of the national schools often formed the hard core of the volunteer movement in district towns. Yet an official source warns us that "it is impossible. . .to regard the national volunteers as purely a students' organisation". Statistics of six police stations in Bakargunj district (Sarupkhati, Gournadi, Jhalakati, Nalchiti, Barisal, Bakargunj) are quoted in this report to show that only 295 out of 1683 volunteers were students or exstudents—a mere 17 per cent. In East Bengal if not in Calcutta, "the bodies of volunteers consist largely of grown men", and even "students" were often in reality adults aged "23 or 24". Attempts were made at some places to recruit "peons and lathials of a class more robust than local residents".[82] Thus Bhupeschandra Nag used his local influence as zamindar in Barodi (near Narayangunj) to rope in large numbers of low-caste Hindus for the Anushilan Samiti.[83] "At Chandpur the volunteers were reported to be chiefly disappointed applicants for government clerkships or employees of the jute firms of the town."[84] But what recurs time and again is the link with land, the close connection between the movement and the intermediate tenure-holders (from whom the professions were also largely recruited)—thus "in Sarupkhati nearly half the volunteers are said to be talukdars, that is to say, persons with a tenure-holding interest in the land".[85] In Mukunda Das's jatra *Palli-seva* (Service to the Village) the volunteers assure the zamindar's son that none of them have to worry

[81] Report on the Anushilan Samiti by H. L. Salkeld, 10 December 1908, para 2, in Home Political Progs Deposit, April 1909, n. 2.

[82] Home Political Progs Deposit, October 1907, n. 19, para 7.

[83] Report on the Anushilan Samiti, 10 December 1908, para 7—Home Political Progs Deposit, April 1909, n. 2. Cf. also History Sheet of Bhupeschandra Nag, para 3—Deportation of certain persons in Bengal and E. Bengal and Assam under Regulation III of 1818—Home Political Progs A, February 1909, n. 137.

[84] Home Political Progs Deposit, October 1907, n. 19, para 7.

[85] *Ibid.*

overmuch about their "rice and dal", since all have some land—and presumably men to till it for them.[86]

Thus the samiti movement touched virtually all sections of the Hindu bhadralok community, but seldom reached beyond its frontiers. The peasants of Barisal had no doubt come to deeply respect and love Aswinikumar Dutta—"the 'babu' who protects us in times of trouble, who sent us food during the famine and medicine at the time of the cholera. . .If we displease him at the Nawab's command, Allah too will forsake us."[87] Here and elsewhere they must have attended swadeshi meetings, if only—as an Anushilan militant turned communist tells us in his memoirs—as shy and embarrassed participants in their loin-cloth besides the well-dressed babus, brought in by the volunteers to prove Hindu-Muslim unity.[88] But there is no evidence at all of any more direct participation, of peasants as samiti activists for instance. We possess some details about the Dumartalla (village) Yubak Samiti, in Barisal district; it had a priest as president, and consisted of two tahsildars, two kavirajes, two "quacks", the son of a zamindar's naib, an amin of the Barisal settlement office—and a number of students resident

86 "Rajen/Tomader kharachpatra ki sab tineei chalacchen? [referring to Nityananda, the leader of the volunteers].

"Pratham Sebak/Tini kicchu kicchu sahajya karen bote, kintu amader pratyekeri khamar jami acche/Du-tee bhat-daler janye karoree tyaman bhabte hoy na—/"

—*Palli-seva* (no date) Scene II, n. 7. Included in *Mukunda daser granthabali* (1951). The jatra contains some references to Gandhiji, and so is obviously of a later date, at least in the version preserved for us. But it contains a number of songs which were current in the swadeshi days, and the social realities unwittingly exposed in the above passage were applicable as much, if not more, to 1905 as to noncooperation.

87 Such, we are told, was the Barisal peasants' reply to the agents of the Nawab of Dacca. Saratkumar Roy, *Mahatma Aswinikumar* (1926), pp. 138-39.

88 Satis Pakrashi, *Agnidiner katha* (Tales of Fiery Days) (1947), p. 12—describing his boyhood days in Satirpara village of Dacca; the author had joined the Dacca Anushilan at an early age.

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for most of the year in Calcutta.[89] Except in the Anti-Circular Society, Muslim members are almost equally rare.

Another major limitation of the samiti movement was the absence of any effective central coordination or planning. "Although bands of volunteers exist in towns and villages all over Eastern Bengal, and there have been occasions on which they have been drafted to do duty outside their own localities, there is not, I believe, as yet any system of central control."[90] A letter published in the *Bande Mataram* of 29 May 1907 wanted a central association to be set up in Calcutta to coordinate the samitis. There were some even more grandiose plans—there are a few references for instance to an All India Volunteer League, with Tilak and Sarala Debi as presidents, and P. Mitter and Bepinchandra as the Bengal leaders.[91] But all this remained mainly on paper; in practice even the much more modest suggestion for a joint body of the Calcutta samitis[92] does not seem to have ever been realised. The samitis essentially sprang from local roots and under local initiative; and though many of them eventually spread into neighbouring and even quite distant districts,[93] no serious attempt was made to avoid a somewhat wasteful overlapping.

So far we have been talking about samitis in general; but for anything like a complete picture of this movement, a districtwise survey is evidently necessary.

[89] Samitis in the Backergunj District, pp. 63-64—Home Political Progs Deposit, April 1909, n. 2.

[90] Home Political Progs Deposit, October 1907, n. 19, para 5.

[91] Note of 14 March 1908—An Account of Samitis and Volunteer Organisation in Bengal, HFM(B) No. 63. The *Punjabee* of 27 February 1907 referred to a "proposed Indian Volunteer Corps"—Home Political Progs Deposit, October 1970, n. 19, para 5.

[92] Letter of Krishto Das Mullick, *Bengalee*, 15 November 1906.

[93] Thus by 1907 the Swadesh Bandhab of Barisal had spread into Faridpur, Pabna and Rangpur; while the Anushilan was active in Mymensingh, Faridpur, Bakargunj, Tippera, Dinajpur and Sylhet, apart from its original Dacca base. Home Political Deposit, August 1909, n. 26. Appendix II.

II. Samitis in Calcutta

In January 1906, a report drawn up by the inspector-general of police listed the following Calcutta "Clubs and Societies" as "concerned in the present swadeshi movement":

(i) Bande Mataram Samproday, (ii) Jatiya Dhanabhandar, (iii) Sangit Samaj—"originally a music club, now political, with private meetings occasionally", (iv) Field and Academy, (v) Indian Association, (vi) Dawn Society, (vii) Students' Union, (viii) Brati Samiti, (ix) Anti-Circular Society, (x) Students' New Association or Society, (xi) Chhattra Bhandar, (xii) Bengal Store—"ostensibly a shop, but probably a secret society", (xiii) Bharat Anushilan Samiti, (xiv) Sarala Debi Ghoshal's Fencing Club.[94]

An intelligence branch report of 1907 gave a somewhat different list of nineteen samitis; the additional names include the Swadesh Sevak Samiti, the Sakti Samiti led by Lalitmohan Ghoshal, the Atmyonnoti Samiti, and several athletic clubs and 'akharas'.[95]

The societies listed in these reports varied considerably in character and political importance. The Jatiya Dhanabhandar was obviously concerned solely with the collection and receipt of the national fund. Police suspicions about the Sangit Samaj (founded in 1897 by Jyotirindranath Tagore as an institute for the revival of classical Indian music)[96] and the Bengal Store were probably unfounded. Of the other organisations, something has been said already about the Indian Association and the Dawn Society;[97] while the revolutionary groups—Sarala Debi's Club, Anushilan,

[94] Enclosure H, pp. 195-6, of Report on the Agitation against the Partition of Bengal (drawn up by the inspector-general of police), 25 January 1906—Home Public Progs A, June 1906, n. 175.

[95] IB File No. IV/185 of 1907—An Account of Samitis and Volunteer Organisations in Bengal. HEM(B) No. 63.

[96] *Indian Mirror*, 23 May, 2 October 1897; 26 January 1898.

[97] Cf. above, pp. 338, 344-45.

Atmyonnoti, Chhattra Bhandar—will be studied in a later chapter.[98]

The Students' Union and the Students' New Association both had Surendranath as president,[99] and in fact newspaper sources show the one growing out of the other. On 29 August 1905, a meeting held in Ripon College decided to set up a student organisation, with subcommittees in each college and an elected central committee,[100] and such a students' union was actually launched on 7 September.[101] Three months later this was expanded into the Students' and Young Men's Union (presumably the New Association of the police report) with Surendranath president, Nareschandra Sengupta M.A. B.L. and Ekramal Huque secretaries, and Atulchandra Gupta B.A. an assistant secretary.[102] A committee of 32 students from different colleges was set up, to meet every Tuesday in Ripon College; among the five Presidency College representatives we find the name of Rajendra Prasad.[103] The Students' and Young Men's Union organised receptions for examinees, calling on them to spend their coming vacation promoting swadeshi.[104] Working in cooperation with the Anti-Circular Society's 'supply department', it started cost-price swadeshi shops at Dinajpur, Rajshahi, Rangpur, Bogra, Kurigram, Ranaghat and Chandpur.[105] In politics, it aligned itself firmly with Surendranath against his extremist critics. Nareschandra Sengupta attacked excessive radicalism, and urged his listeners to learn from "Burke and Vivekananda";[106] Sasankajiban

[98] Cf. below, Chapter IX.
[99] Home Public Progs A, June 1906, n. 175.
[100] *Bengalee*, 1 September 1905.
[101] *Ibid*, 8 September 1905.
[102] *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 9 December 1905.
[103] Home Public Progs A, June 1906, n. 175.
[104] *Bengalee*, 3 April 1906.
[105] *Ibid*, 1 March, 28 March 1906.
[106] At a meeting of the union in City College on 3 September 1906. *Ibid*, 9 September 1906. The reference to Vivekananda as an apostle of conservatism is intersting and unusual.

Roy (who succeeded Nareschandra as secretary) condemned extremist criticism of the 1906 Congress exhibition for its bideshi advertisements; and 'Lala Rajendra Prasad' at the same meeting deplored the disunion among Calcutta students.[107] We hear little about this association after 1907; probably its moderate connections proved fatal for it.

Much more important, and in fact one of the most interesting of all the samitis, was the Anti-Circular Society. Our information about it also happens to be unusually ample.[108] Started at a 3000-strong College Square student meeting on 4 November 1905 in the wake of the Carlyle Circular and other repressive measures against students, its two principal organisers were Sachindraprasad Basu (fourth-year student of City College in 1905)[109] and (till his untimely death in May 1906) Ramakanta Roy, the engineer lately returned from Japan. The two had been leading student pickets and procession parties (to sing swadeshi songs) in the streets of Calcutta from the earliest days of the boycott movement.[110] But it was an "open secret", as Sachindraprasad put it in his annual report, that the real leader of the society was Krishnakumar Mitra.[111] Its headquarters was at 4/1, College Square, adjoining Krishnakumar's house, and Sachindraprasad later became his son-in-law.[112] Immediately after the foundation of the society, its leading

[107] *Ibid*, 9 December 1906.

[108] Apart from a few official and numerous newspapers references, there is the *Annual Report of the Anti-Circular Society* presented by Sachindraprasad Basu before the anniversary meeting of 4 November 1906 (*Bengalee*, 7-10 November 1906); the account given in the contemporary pamphlet *Lanchhiter samman* (Honour to the Humiliated) (June 1906); the collection of valedictory tributes to Sachindraprasad Basu published in 1941; and Sukumar Mitra's article "Sri Aurobindo Ackroyd Ghosh" (*Masik Basumati*, 1358-59).

[109] Article by Surendranath Ghosh in *Sachindraprasad Basu* (1914).

[110] *Bengalee*, 7-8 November 1906.

[111] *Ibid*, 10 November 1906.

[112] Sukumar Mitra, "Sri Aurobindo Ackroyd Ghosh", *Masik Basumati*, Paus 1358.

members rushed to Rangpur, to found there the first national school for rusticated students on 8 November 1905.[113] In Calcutta, too, the Anti-Circular Society set up a school for a group of expelled Noakhali boys, and we are told that Sachindraprasad's fiery eloquence had a lot to do with converting hesitant leaders like Surendranath and Rashbehari Ghosh to the cause of national education.[114] The contemporary pamphlet *Lanchhiter samman* (Honour to be Humiliated—June 1906) describes the society as having five departments—education, music, "investigation" (an euphemism for picketing and keeping a watch on bideshi purchasers), supply (of swadeshi goods) and propaganda.[115] The first was closed down when national education "passed into the hands of the leaders of the country" and the Procession Party became the special charge of Liakat Husain; by November 1906 the work of the society had been consolidated into two departments—general, and supply.[116] The music department, however, seems to have been reopened later on under Hemchandra Sen, City College teacher.[117] The supply department had been set up on 9 December 1905 primarily as a check on profiteering by swadeshi dealers; the society purchased cloth directly from mill-agents and its members hawked it from door to door, selling strictly on a nonprofit basis. No less than 75 branches had been set up in the districts by October 1906, and the total sale proceeds in eleven months amounted to Rs 101,422-1-3.[118]

[113] *Bengalee*, 8 November 1906.

[114] Articles by Sundarimohan Das and Surendrakumar Chakrabarti in *Sachindraprasad Basu*.

[115] *Lanchhiter samman*, pp. 37-40.

[116] Sachindraprasad's Report, *Bengalee*, 8 November 1906.

[117] Hemchandra Sen edited a collection of swadeshi songs (*Matrigatha*, 1907. In 1910 he underwent six months' solitary confinement without trial in atrocious conditions; Surendranath brought the case to the notice of the India Office. Morley Collection MSS. Eur, D. 573/36. File entitled Treatment of Under-Trial Prisoners in India under the Act of 1908, September-November 1910.

[118] *Bengalee*, 10 November 1906. For the detailed statistics of monthly sales by the supply department, cf. above, p. 119.

The general department also spread into the mufassil, and there are reports of society branches being set up in Bankura,[119] Dacca (where Surendranath hailed the entry of 71 young men into the organisation),[120] Noakhali and Tippera.[121] Volunteer societies were set up for the first time at Ranaghat, Krishnagar and Diamond Harbour immediately after Sachindraprasad's visit to these towns.[122] Anti-Circular volunteers, as is well-known, faced police lathis with real heroism at the Barisal conference; they were also in the forefront in the campaign for selling Banga Luxmi shares.[123] Despite the close personal connections of Krishnakumar and Sachindraprasad with Surendranath, the politics of the Anti-Circular Society was by no means entirely moderate. An inner circle within the society set up a defence association for training in lathi-play, boxing and ju-jutsu, with Aurobindo as president and Sukumar Mitra (Krishnakumar's son) as secretary.[124] The defence association raised funds for the imprisoned *Yugantar* printer Basantakumar Bhattacharyya;[125] Sachindraprasad himself allegedly had links with the Anushilan,[126] and many Anti-Circular militants eventually found their way into the ranks of the revolutionary movement.[127]

Where the Anti-Circular society differed sharply from most extremist and terrorist organisations, however, was in its uncompromising opposition to any form of Hindu revivalism

[119] *Ibid*, 3 July 1906.
[120] Abstract of Reports from E. Bengal and Assam during the second half of September 1906, Enclosure A, Home Public Progs A, December 1906. n. 144-48.
[121] Home Political Progs Deposit, August 1909, n. 26, Appendix II.
[122] Dossier of State Prisoner Sachindraprasad Basu, p. 5. Home Political Progs Deposit, November 1909, n. 2.
[123] *Bengalee*, 9 November 1906.
[124] Sukumar Mitra, *op. cit.*
[125] *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 10 October 1907.
[126] Home Political Progs Deposit, November 1909, n. 2.
[127] And two of them—Nalini Gupta and Abani Mukherji—were to play a distinguished part also in the formative period of the Indian communist movement. Sukumar Mitra, *op. cit.*

and steadfast adherence to the ideal of Hindu-Muslim unity. We have already noted the society's efforts to evolve a non-sectarian and democratic imagery for the movement.[128] In February 1906, the society leaders visited Jessore and staved off a possible riot during the Id festival.[129] Sachindraprasad in his annual report urged tolerance for Muslim rites like the ceremonial slaughter of cows, and made the explicit statement—"We could not take part in the last Shivaji festival, lest it might wound the susceptibilities of our numerous Mahomedan workers and sympathisers."[130] The Anti-Circular delegates to the Berhampore provincial conference included Abul Hossain, Din Mohomed, Dedar Bux, Ebrahim Hossain, Abdul Majid and Abdul Gafur;[131] Liakat Husain was closely associated with the society from its earliest days; and it is a small but perhaps a significant fact that Krishnakumar in the swadeshi period entrusted his Samya Press to the charge of a Muslim named Abdul Latif.[132]

The Brati Samiti was started in the autumn of 1905 by Monoranjan Guha Thakurta, for the "hawking of swadeshi goods and protection of native females from Europeans".[133] Its Faridpur namesake became one of the most important of the samitis, but we have little information about the activities of the original Calcutta society. Kaliprasanna Kabyabisharod organised the Bhowanipur Swadesh Sevak Samproday, a band of itinerant singers for propagating the swadeshi cause; this accompanied Surendranath and other moderate leaders in their mufassil tours—we hear of them visiting Kushtia, for instance, in February 1907.[134] The

[128] Cf. above, pp. 307-8.
[129] Government of Bengal to Government of India. No. 975 P of 7 April 1906—Home Public Progs A, June 1906, n. 179.
[130] *Bengalee*, 9 November 1906.
[131] *Ibid*, 20 March 1907.
[132] Cf. the *Bengal Library Catalogue* entries for Samya Press (6 College Square) Publications after December 1906.
[133] Enclosure H, Home Public Progs A, June 1906, n. 175. *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 26 September 1905.
[134] *Lanchhiter samman*, p. 40. *Bengalee*, 24 February 1907.

Bande Mataram Bhikshu Samproday was set up in October 1905 with the principal purpose of collecting funds through processions singing "this grand national anthem".[135] By the middle of November 1905, Rs 3452 had been raised in this manner for the national fund.[136] The Samproday had as its chief office-bearers Manmathanath Mitra, Amritalal Mitter and Sureschandra Samajpati.[137] Branches were set up at Dacca[138] and Nabadwip.[139] The activities of this society were not wholly confined to fund-raising; we hear of it running a weaving school for a time at 121/1 Cornwallis Street,[140] and it also organised trips to the Ramkrishna math at Belur and memorial meetings for Bankimchandra.[141] Activities of the latter kind as well as the important role in the organisation of men like Sureschandra Samajpati[142] indicate clearly that in ideology the Samproday stood at the opposite pole to the Anti-Circular Society. Extremist connections are also fairly evident particularly after the ousting of Manmathanath Mitra[143] in April 1906, with Upadhyay, Shyamsundar Chakrabarti and Bhupendranath Dutta attending the first annual meetings of the

135 *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 13 October 1905.
136 *Ibid*, 20 November 1905.
137 *Ibid*, 13 October 1905. Also Enclosure H, *op. cit.*
138 *Ibid*, 9 January 1906.
139 *Bengalee*, 25 November 1906.
140 *Ibid*, 1 March 1906.
141 *Ibid*, 7 March 1906, 10 April 1906. Hemendraprasad Ghosh in his diary has recorded one such pilgrimage by 80 members of the Samproday to Bankimchandra's ancestral village of Kantalpara, where "there was 'golemal' (row) because of our hosts (Bankimchandra's grandsons) having used Liverpool salt in cooking". Entry dated 29 June 1906.
142 Editor of *Sahitya*, and leader of the socially conservative anti-Tagore group in the Bengali literary world of those times.
143 This followed a personal quarrel between Manmathanath and Sureschandra Samajpati—the latter had apparently written articles in the *Sandhya* attacking the former. Hemendraprasad enthusiastically plunged into the fray on the side of Sureschandra. Unpublished Diary, entries dated 19 and 22 April 1906.

society in September 1906.[144] Another Calcutta society dominated by the extremists was the Sakti Samiti led by Lalitmohan Ghoshal, with its main centre at Ahiritola.[145]

The Field and Academy mentioned in the January 1906 police-list was not a volunteer organisation, but a club or meeting-place of extremist leaders like Pal, Chittaranjan Das and Subodhchandra Mallick. On the first floor of this building (16 Cornwallis Street) was the famous mess started in June 1905 by Brahmabandhab Upadhyay and Satischandra Mukherji, of which the other boarders were Mokshadacharan Samadhyayi (the future revolutionary) and the Dawn Society activists, Radhakumud Mukherji, Rabindranarayan Ghosh and Benoykumar Sarkar. Described somewhat grandiloquently by Benoykumar Sarkar as the "Green Room of the Bengal Revolution",[146] the Field and Academy was to the extremists what 62 Bowbazar (the Indian Association office) was to the men around Surendranath. Hemendraprasad Ghosh tells us that discussions at the Field and Academy led to the formation of the Swadeshi Mandali in December 1905, which organised the June 1906 Shivaji Utsava.[147] It seems likely that the Bangiya Swaraj Samiti mentioned in a newspaper report of February 1908 was but a new name for this association of radical leaders. The list of delegates chosen by this samiti for the Pabna provincial conference reads like a roll-call of the Bengal extremists—Hirendranath Dutt, Chittaranjan Das, Rajatnath Roy, Bijoychandra Chatterji, Mokshadacharan Samadhyayi, Hemendraprasad Ghosh, Shyamsundar Chakrabarti, Auro-

144 *Bengalee*, 19 September 1906.

145 *Bande Mataram*, 18 June 1907. Cf. also HEM(B). No. 63.

146 Haridas Mukherji, *Benoy sarkarer baithake* (1942), pp. 285-86. Haridas and Uma Mukherji, *Origins of the National Education Movement* (1957), p. 20.

147 Hemendraprasad Ghosh, *Congress* (1921), Chapter VI. Hemendraprasad's Unpublished Diary also contains numerous references to the Swadeshi Mandali—e.g. the entries dated 13, 15, 29 and 30 January, and 26 May 1906.

bindo Ghosh, Monoranjan Guha Thakurta, Sureschandra Samajpati, Provaschandra De, Dr Sundarimohan Das.[148]

Despite the plethora of societies and a galaxy of distinguished leaders, one gets the impression that the samitis in Calcutta never became as formidable as their counterparts in districts like Barisal or Dacca. Otherwise it is difficult to explain the unexpectedly early collapse of picketing in the metropolis.[149] On 28 May 1907, Fraser told Minto : "There is nothing in the state of feeling in Calcutta to cause any immediate alarm. There is said to be no indication of any unrest in the lower order, and it is they who are responsible for trouble in Calcutta."[150] Four months later, a CID report similarly noted with relief that the volunteers have "failed to attract the formidable elements of disorder which exist in the population of Calcutta".[151] In other words, the movement in Calcutta remained almost entirely confined to students and other bhadralok young men—and even here Hemchandra Kanungo complains that city-bred youths tended to keep away from radical politics, the bulk of recruits coming from mufassil students resident in the metropolis.[152] The possibilities of a link-up with the trade union movement which had started developing in and around Calcutta were never seriously explored. In the street clashes of October 1907, swadeshi volunteers found themselves being beaten up by "mehters, dhangars (Corporation sweepers) and constables without uniform".[153] It is not surprising that the shift to methods of terroristic elite action occurred first of all in Calcutta.

[148] *Bengalee*, 5 February 1908. Brahmabandhab had died in October 1907, and Bepinchandra was in jail.

[149] For the decline of picketing in Calcutta, cf. above, pp. 145-46.

[150] Fraser to Minto, 28 May 1907. Minto Papers, Reel No. 1, M 980.

[151] Memorandum on the National Volunteer Movement prepared by the CID, 11 September 1907, para 7. Home Political Progs Deposit, October 1907, n. 19.

[152] Hemchandra Kanungo, *op. cit.*, pp. 26-27.

[153] *Sandhya*, 28 October 1907—RNP(B) for week ending 2 November 1907. Cf. also *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 5 and 8 October 1907.

III. Samitis in West Bengal, Bihar and Orissa

Even a cursory glance at the contemporary sources makes obvious a sharp contrast between volunteer activities in East Bengal and that in the mufassil districts of the old province. Information about the latter is extremely meagre—a paucity of material which must have been due mainly to the relative weakness of the movement itself, though we must add the rider that in one or two districts such samitis as did exist seem to have functioned through underground channels from an early date, and hence have left little public record of their work.

The partition made the Bengalis a minority among the 54 millions left in the old province,[154] and not a very popular minority at that in the Bihari- and Oriya-speaking districts, where they had dominated the services for long, thanks to their lead in English education. Emergent Oriya national consciousness found expression through the Utkal Union Conference led by Madhusudan Das, which had set up 381 branches by January 1905. The conference demanded a separate Oriya-speaking province, including Ganjam.[155] Das supported nonpolitical swadeshi economic enterprise, but not surprisingly, kept strictly aloof from the openly anti-British boycott campaign started by the Bengalis.[156] In Bihar, too, we are told that a visit of Surendranath to Bhagalpur in the autumn of 1906 only created a split "between the Biharis (both Hindus and Mahomedans) on the one side and the Bengalis on the other".[157]

[154] Prepartition Bengal had 26.1 million Hindi-speaking and 4.5 million Oriya-speaking people according to the census of 1901; virtually all of them were included in the reduced province of Bengal after 1905 with a total population of 54.7 millions. *Imperial Gazetteer of India—Bengal.*

[155] *Uriya and Navasamvad* (Balasore) 25 January 1905, cited by J. R. McLane, "The Decision to Partition Bengal in 1905"—*The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, Volume II, No. 3 (July 1965). Cf. also *New India*, 7 January 1904.

[156] Home Public Progs A, June 1906, n. 175, para 57.

[157] Fortnightly Report from Bengal, 8 October 1906, para 5. Home Public Progs A, December 1906, n. 144.

Outside Calcutta, Presidency and Burdwan divisions (i.e. the Bengali-speaking districts), the movement consequently was confined to "places where there are Bengali settlements".[158] Apart from residents, middle-class Bengalis who flocked to Chota Nagpur country towns (Deoghar, Simultala, Madhupur, Giridih, etc.) or to the sea-side at Puri in the puja vacations also tried to spread the movement—with the result that at Deoghar the local people termed swadeshi "babu tamasha".[159] But some non-Bengali youths did join the movement—we have already had occasion to mention Rajendra Prasad—as well as one or two public figures (like Dipnarayan Singh of Bhagalpur, who presided over the Berhampore provincial conference of 1907). As for volunteer associations, Monoranjan Guha Thakurta set up a branch of his Brati Samiti at Giridih (where he owned mica mines) in September 1905—of which young Rathindranath for a short while was an enthusiastic member;[160] a group of twenty-five was reported from Manbhum in September 1907, mostly schoolboys;[161] and there was a Sevak-Samiti at Gaya which had five or six Bihari members apart from the Bengalis.[162] The Oriya districts of Balasore, Cuttack and Puri became for a brief while centres of intense activity conducted by the Calcutta Anushilan, under cover of the famine relief work which it undertook in early 1908. Several 'akharas' were set up, the one at Cuttack remaining active till 1913 and possibly influencing the young Subhaschandra Bose, and Jagatguru Shankaracharyya of Puri became a sympathiser. But—as Bhupendranath Dutta relates—most youthful revolu-

[158] Fortnightly Report from Bengal, 17 September 1906, para 2. Home Public Progs B, October 1906, n. 13.

[159] Abstract of Reports from Bengal during first half of October 1906, para 3. Home Public Progs A, December 1906, n. 310-11.

[160] *Daily Hitavadi*, 8 September 1905—RNP(B) for week ending 16 September 1905. Rathindranath Tagore, *Pitri-smriti* (1966), p. 98.

[161] Appendix B. Home Political Progs Deposit, October 1907, n. 19.

[162] An Account of Samitis and Volunteer Organisations in Bengal—HEM(B) No. 63.

tionary recruits soon afterwards turned into loyal civil servants.[163]

Midnapur presents at first sight the rather puzzling case of a district where the agitation was officially stated to be "remarkably mild" in January 1906[164] and even "dying out" except in Tamluk in January 1907,[165] but which had become an extremist stronghold by the end of the latter year (as the district conference of December 1907 showed), and which in 1908 was to produce in Kshudiram and Satyendranath two out of Bengal's first four revolutionary martyrs. The explanation seems to be that though there was in Midnapur town the usual coterie of not-very-active moderate lawyer-politicians,[166] the initiative had been taken from the beginning by a revolutionary secret society, formed way back in 1902 under the inspiration of Jnanendranath Basu, and later coming under the general leadership of Aurobindo.[167] Working quietly but very effectively, men like Satyendranath Basu and Hemchandra Kanungo built up a strong organisation in the district after 1905, with a chain of 'akharas' (four of them in Midnapur town itself),[168] and weaving centres and Chhattra Bhandar branches which served as cover for revolutionary activity.[169] Samitis were active also in Tamluk and Mahishadal,[170] and the movement was greatly helped by the influence of two prominent zamindars—Raja Narendralal Khan of Narajole

[163] Bhupendranath Dutta, *Bharater dwitiya swadhinata sangram* (1949), pp. 61. 164-65.

[164] Home Public Progs A, June 1906, n. 175, para 57.

[165] Fortnightly Report from Bengal, 9 January 1907—Home Public Progs A, February 1907, n. 152.

[166] The most prominent of these were Kshirodbihari Dutt and Pyarilal Ghosh, who started a Bilati-Barjan Samiti (Society for the Exclusion of Foreign Goods) in October 1905. Ishanchandra Mahapatra, *Saheed Kshudiram* (1948), p. 42.

[167] For more details about this very interesting group, cf. below, Chapter IX.

[168] An Account of Samitis and Volunteer Organisations in Bengal —HEM(B) No. 63.

[169] Hemchandra Kanungo, *op. cit.*, Chapter VI. Benoyjiban Ghosh. *Agniyuger astraguru hemchandra* (1952), p. 51.

[170] HEM(B) No. 63, *op. cit.*

and Digambar Nanda of Mugberia (near Contai).[171] Efforts were made to draw in the villagers through magic lantern lectures,[172] though the real breakthrough to the peasantry —which was to make of Midnapur the strongest base of nationalism in West Bengal for more than a generation— had to wait for the 1920s.

The agitation in the other districts of West Bengal was relatively weak, and seems to have existed as a continuous force only in more or less isolated pockets. Thus in Howrah district there was an Anushilan branch at Fuleswar (near Uluberia),[173] a few 'akharas' started by the Bhowanipur Sevak Samproday,[174] and a centre of activity in the Bagnan area thanks to the efforts of Gispati Raychaudhuri.[175] In Hooghly there were some branches of the Calcutta Sakti Samiti[176]; and the movement was reportedly "very strong" in Arambagh (with local zamindars giving orders that people selling bideshi goods were "to be taken to the zamindari cutchery for trial") and Uttarpara (thanks to the efforts of Rajendranath Mukherji, the son of Pearymohun).[177] Kalna subdivision was the main stronghold of swadeshi in the Burdwan district, allegedly due to the influence of the local Brahmins.[178] Ramakanta Roy started a Swadeshi Bhandar (stores) in the industrial town of Ranigunj in March 1906,[179]

[171] Benoyjiban Ghosh, *op. cit.*, pp. 54-57. For Digambar Nanda and his protegee Khirodenarayan Bhuyia—both of whom the Bengal government wanted to deport in 1910—see also Home Political Progs A, March 1910, n. 33-40.

[172] Hemchandra Kanungo, *op. cit.*

[173] Home Political Progs Deposit, October 1907, n. 19—Appendix B. Cf. also *Howrah District Gazetteer* (1909), p. 146.

[174] HEM(B) No. 63, *op. cit.*

[175] Report on the Anti-Partition and Swadeshi Movement in Bengal (7 September 1906) para 12—Home Public Progs B, October 1906, n. 13.

[176] Home Political Progs Deposit, October 1907, n. 19, *op. cit.*

[177] Home Political Progs A, February 1907, n. 152, *op. cit.*

[178] Home Public Progs B, October 1906, n. 13— *op. cit.* Cf. also p. 311 above.

[179] *Bengalee*, 31 March 1906. It sold cloth supplied by the Anti-Circular Society.

and the local Swadeshi Sabha here deserves to be remembered for having brought out a six-page pamphlet entitled *Dharmaghat* (Strike) during the movement of the EIR employees.[180] Ranigunj also had a branch of the Joydev Sevak Samproday, which had been started at Kenduli (the site of the annual Joydev mela) in Birbhum district by a local mohunt (religious leader) named Damodar Brajobasi.[181] A volunteer society was set up in 1908 at Nimtita, in Murshidabad district.[182]

The movement attained greater strength in the four districts of the old province on the left bank of the Hooghly, adjoining Bakargunj and Faridpur—though even here there is no development of strong independent samitis. The numerous volunteer organisations of these districts seem to have been either purely local bodies, or branches of Calcutta societies (most often the Anushilan). Some twenty volunteer groups are reported from the 24-Parganas, including a number of palli samitis near Diamond Harbour;[183] the main centres were Sonarpur and Mozilpur to the south of Calcutta and the Taki-Arbalia area in the north-east of the district —terrorist groups were to become active in these regions in the near future.[184] Khulna district was a storm-centre right from the beginning, the *Bande Mataram* once even comparing it to Barisal.[185] The volunteer organisation here was connected intimately with the national schools of Khulna town, Bagerhat and Senhati;[186] efforts at village or-

[180] *The Bengal Library Catalogue 1906,* Volume IV, contains the following entry—"827. Sarma (Bholanath), Dharmaghat, p. 6. Girish Ch. Mandal, Swadeshi Sabha, Ranigunj. 25.10.06. As. 1. 1000 copies." Unfortunately no copy of this pamphlet—unique for its age—seems to have survived.

[181] HEM(B) No. 63—*op. cit.*

[182] *Ibid.*

[183] *Ibid.*

[184] Cf. Home Political Progs A, March 1910, n. 33-40, for information about Jatindranath Roychaudhuri (zamindar of Taki), the 'Mozilpur Branch', and the 'Sonarpur Branch'.

[185] *Bande Mataram,* 4 July 1907.

[186] HEM(B) No. 63—*op. cit.* The Senhati National School "is said

ganisation in the Satkhira region have been mentioned already in another context.[187] In February 1909 the government banned, under the Act of 1908, the Brati Samiti of Kurmira in Satkhira subdivision.[188] In Jessore the volunteers at the district conference of June 1907 were still apparently on a nonpermanent basis,[189] but other reports speak of samitis with Calcutta connections functioning at Balarampur, Brahmandanga and Lohagar.[190] In the Bhusana-Muhammadpur region (on the border between Jessore and Faridpur), a Swadesh Bandhab Union established in April 1906 built up an impressive organisation—fourteen branches, twenty-eight palli samitis, and a national school at Kamargram.[191] Across the river from Kalna, the influence of the Brahmins of Santipur and Nabadwip helped to make Nadia district "a happy hunting ground for political agitators".[192] Volunteers of Santipur town earned notoriety by their assault on two European missionaries at the railway station on 30 June 1906.[193] Samitis were active also at Krishnagar, Nabadwip, Kushtia, Ranaghat and Kumarkhali.[194] There were three swadeshi dacoities in Nadia during 1908-9, allegedly committed by the "Krishnagar gang" of revolutionaries with centres at Krishnagar, Santipur and Kushtia. Jatindranath Mukherji—

to be practically the same as the local volunteer organisation"—G. C. Denham's Note on National Schools in Bengal (17 June 1909) included in Home Political Progs Deposit, November 1909, n. 6.

187 See above, p. 351.

188 Diary of Events, 1909, entry for 26 February. Home Political Progs Deposit, March 1910, n. 1.

189 Home Political Progs Deposit, October 1907, n. 19—*op. cit.*

190 HFM(B) No. 63—*op. cit.*

191 *Ibid.* Cf. also *Bengalee*, 18 April 1907 for First Annual Report of Bhusana-Muhammadpur Swadesh Bandhab Union.

192 Fortnightly Report from Bengal, 17 September 1906, para 3. Report on the Anti-Partition and Swadeshi Movement in Bengal (7 September 1906), para 12. Home Public Progs B, October 1906, n. 13.

193 The volunteers suspected that the Indian woman accompanying the missionaries was being forcibly taken by them. Abstract of Reports from Bengal, July 1906, para 4—Home Public Progs Deposit, September 1906, n. 5.

194 HFM(B) No. 63—*op. cit.*

the great 'Bagha Jatin'—himself came from Koya (in Kushtia subdivision) where he is said to have started a revolutionary society as early as 1901. Jatindranath incidentally also organised a branch of the Anushilan in far-off Darjeeling, while serving there as finance department clerk[195]—virtually the only known instance of swadeshi activity in this outlying northern district of Bengal, whose hill peoples remained indifferent towards the agitation despite a few early attempts at political speeches in Nepali.[196]

IV. Samitis in Eastern Bengal and Assam

A hypothetical map of the swadeshi movement in Eastern Bengal and Assam would divide the province into three zones. A central bloc—the districts of Bakargunj, Faridpur, Dacca and Mymensingh—constituted the heart of the movement; here originated the five principal samitis (Swadesh Bandhab, Brati, Dacca Anushilan, Suhrid, Sadhana), the ones that were banned on 5 January 1909.[197] To the north-west and east of this zone lay Rangpur, Tippera and Sylhet—districts with strong, though not independent, volunteer organisations. Beyond this area, to the north-west and south-east, were the eight other Bengali-speaking districts of the province (Jalpaiguri, Dinajpur, Malda, Rajshahi, Bogra, Pabna; Noakhali, Chittagong). These comprised a second zone, with a volunteer movement everywhere, but much more thinly spread out. Assam valley and the hill tracts constituted a third zone, virtually untouched by swadeshi politics. As an index of the movement's relative intensity we may take the areas covered by the ban on meetings in May 1907—Bakargunj, Faridpur, Dacca, Mymensingh, Tippera, Pabna and Rangpur districts; the Habigunj subdivision of Sylhet; and the Sadar thana of Noakhali.[198]

[195] Home Political Progs A, March 1910, n. 33-40.
[196] Home Public Progs A, June 1906, n. 175—para 57.
[197] The Calcutta Anushilan was banned on 12 October 1909. Home Political Progs Deposit, March 1909, n. 1—op. cit.
[198] Papers connected with the Seditious Meetings Act—Home Political Progs Deposit, April 1911, n. 7.

A single example, taken from the hey-day of the boycott agitation, might suffice for the third area—"So far as Assam is concerned, the swadeshi movement does not seem to have touched even the outer fringe of Manchester trade." Swadeshi cloth and karkatch salt were "being used by a handful of men among the educated community" only.[199] Assam lagged far behind even Bihar and Orissa in political development—there was just a single Assamese newspaper in 1906, as compared to ten Hindi, nine Oriya, and eighty Bengali[200]—and in any case educated people there had little reason to be attracted by a movement at least one of whose early leaders had cheerfully described Assam as "the land of kala jaar or black fever", inhabited by "strange people with whom we have nothing in common".[201] Only in Cachar with its many Bengalis were there some volunteers—and that apparently a mere handful.[202]

Chittagong produced a leader of all-Bengal stature in Jatramohan Sen; the town had a small volunteer organisation (fifty-nine members in 1907, according to police reports)[203] and a national school. Volunteers distributed thirty thousand handbills at a Sivaratri mela in the district in February 1907.[204] Noakhali too had its national school and a volunteer body of thirty-seven, as well as a branch of the Calcutta Anti-Circular Society.[205]

There was little activity in Jalpaiguri, except for occasional visits by Calcutta leaders;[206] in March 1907 the movement

[199] *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 29 December 1905.

[200] Report on Vernacular and Anglo-Vernacular Newspapers published in the Lower Provinces and in Assam in 1906—Annual Report on Indian Papers, Volume IV, p. 87.

[201] Sitanath Roy at the Town Hall meeting of 18 March 1904—P. Mukherji, *All About Partition* (1905), p. 64.

[202] Cf. above, p. 356.

[203] Home Political Progs Deposit, August 1909, n. 26—Appendix I.

[204] *Bande Mataram*, 27 February 1907.

[205] Home Political Progs Deposit, August 1909, n. 26—Appendix I and II.

[206] Thus four Calcutta "agitators" visited Jalpaiguri on 6-7 January 1906. D.O No. 145 Public, 12 July 1906, from H. H. Risley to Sir A. Godley—Home Public Progs A, July 1906, n. 124.

there was reported to be "dormant" and in need of a visit by some swadeshi preacher.[207] The national school and forty volunteers[208] of Jalpaiguri town apparently had little impact on the political situation. Dinajpur had a branch of the Dacca Anushilan[209] and a national school described by the director of public instruction in June 1908 as "the most notorious of all these schools".[210] In Malda, the national school was allegedly started by a secret society for direct political training.[211] The Jatiya Siksha Samiti set up in this district in June 1907 made a notable attempt to promote primary education,[212] but otherwise there was little volunteer activity. Rajshahi was another weak spot; the district conferences held here in April 1907 and November 1908 were entirely of the old moderate type.[213] The first gave "a great welcome" to Surendranath, the second was reported to have been "quiet and dull, (and) the attendance was small..."[214] Bogra had a Sevak Samiti which in 1908 adopted an ambitious programme, including picketing, setting up of 'akharas', sankirtan parties to preach swadeshi, as well as the establishment of "night schools for spreading education among the labouring classes".[215] One does not know to what extent—if at all—this programme was implemented.

In the adjacent district of Pabna, the movement got off to a flying start, with a Hitakari Sabha set up in August 1905,[216] and Sirajgunj student volunteers earning notoriety

207 *Bande Mataram*, 5 March 1907.
208 Home Political Progs Deposit, August 1909, n. 26—Appendix I.
209 *Ibid*, Appendix II.
210 Report on National Schools, 8 June 1908, para 6—Home Political Progs A, March 1909, n. 10-11.
211 Supplementary Report on National Schools, 28 October 1908—*Ibid.*
212 *Dawn*, May 1910. Cf. also Chapter IV above.
213 *Bengalee*, 13 April 1907.
214 Fortnightly Report from Eastern Bengal and Assam for second half of November 1908—Home Political Progs A, January 1909, n. 94, para 7.
215 HFM(B) No. 63—IB Note of 2 May 1908.
216 *Bengalee*, 8 August, 1 September 1905.

in November of the same year by their clash with an Anglo-Indian official of the Bengal Bank. The latter incident—in which "the volunteers as a regularly organised body first came to prominent notice"[217]—started the chain of events which eventually led to the fall of Fuller.[218] A contemporary diary gives a vivid description of the movement in Pabna in the winter of 1905-6—the bazaar is full of swadeshi goods, walls display the Bande Mataram slogan and "the town is busy with the hum of the primeval charka".[219] But this early promise was not fully realised, and already by December 1905 there are reports of a fall in tempo.[220] The district movement remained under moderate leadership,[221] and by the summer of 1907 the big zamindars of the district had abandoned the enforcement of swadeshi in their 'hats'—even the naibs of Shahzadpur (Rabindranath's estate), we are told, were busy competing in foreign goods with the neighbouring Manirampur 'hat'.[222] Only forty-eight volunteers are listed for Pabna in June 1907.[223] However, we learn from other sources that there was also a secret revolutionary circle in Pabna, headed by Abinash Chakrabarti and Annada Kaviraj, and that this provided the basis for the North Bengal group in the terrorist movement after 1908.[224]

[217] Home Political Progs Deposit, October 1907, n. 19—para 3.
[218] Parliamentary Papers (House of Commons), 1906, Volume 81 Cd. 3242—Resignation of J. Bampfylde Fuller.
[219] Unpublished Diary of Gyanchandra Banerji, entries for 24 January and 4 February 1906.
[220] *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 23 December 1905.
[221] Thus in February 1907 Surendranath and Kabyabisharod visited Sirajgunj, apparently as a counterblast to Bepinchandra's East Bengal tour. Abstract of Reports from E. Bengal and Assam during second half of February 1907—Home Public Progs A, April 1907, pp. 207-10. Boycott was excluded from the instructions given to the delegates from Pabna for the 1907 Congress—*Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 21 December 1907. The strength of the moderates in Pabna may have been due partly to the influence exerted by Asutosh and Jogesh Chaudhuri, prominent leaders who had estates in this district.
[222] *Bande Mataram*, 23 May, 26 August 1907.
[223] Home Political Progs Deposit, August 1909, n. 26—Appendix I.
[224] Bhupendranath Dutta, *op. cit.*, pp. 118-19.

Rangpur had the distinction of having set up the first national school, in November 1905, after the local boys had been fined by the district magistrate for attending a swadeshi meeting.[225] The school soon became "the focus of the revolutionary movement in the district".[226] We have little information about Rangpur volunteers (except their number—an impressive 700),[227] possibly because the movement here early acquired a secret and revolutionary character. The first abortive attempt at a swadeshi dacoity took place in Rangpur district in the summer of 1906.[228] Sylhet —a Bengali-speaking district transferred to Assam in 1874 —had branches of the Suhrid and Anushilan, as well as a Sevak Samiti which was probably an offshoot of the latter body.[229] The main centre here was the Habigunj subdivision—incidentally the birth-place of Bepinchandra Pal.

Tippera district had important centres of volunteer activity at Chandpur, Comilla and Brahmanbaria. The Central Sevak Samiti of the district had twenty branches; the police later discovered this organisation to have been a wing of the Dacca Anushilan. There were also units of the Mymensingh Suhrid Samiti and the Calcutta Anti-Circular.[230] In January 1907 the Meher Mela near Chandpur was invaded by a band of two hundred volunteers in uniform and armed with lathis; the local police "appear to have been completely cowed" and boycott was successfully enforced.[231] The district conference next month, attended

225 *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 6 November, 9 November 1905.
226 IB File No. 739/15—HFM(B) No. 63.
227 Cf. above, p. 356.
228 Hemchandra Kanungo, *Banglay biplab prachesta* (1928), Chapter X.
229 Home Political Progs Deposit, August 1909, n. 26—Appendix II.
230 *Ibid.* Cf. also HFM(B) No. 63.
231 Fortnightly Report from E. Bengal and Assam No. 328T, 24 January 1907, para 3. Home Public Progs A, February 1907, n. 154. *Bengalee*, 15 January 1907. About thirty volunteers were eventually arrested, but had to be released due to lack of evidence. Among those arrested it is interesting to find the name of Kalimohan Ghosh, then

by Pal, Rasul and Abdul Gafur, was dominated by the extremists. Petitioning the government was entirely abjured, and the resolutions included one on village "Defence Associations—to protect the people from police oppression".[232] Participants were said to have included Muslim villagers, speaking in their homely dialects.[233] But soon afterwards the visit of Salimulla to Comilla sparked off serious communal riots, with swadeshi volunteers getting involved in direct clashes with the Muslims for the first time.[234] This, together with dissensions among the leaders, probably brought about a decline in the movement. In April 1908, Sachindraprasad saw the Chandpur bazaar full of bideshi goods.[235]

Through twenty years of selfless work, Aswinikumar Dutta had created among the students of his Brojomohan School and College in Barisal town (Bakargunj district) a unique tradition of discipline and social service. Prior to 1905, this spirit had manifested itself in student organisations like the Bandhab Samiti for moral and religious training; the Little Brothers of the Poor to help the sick and the needy; and societies for preventing cruelty to animals and fighting fires.[236] On this foundation arose the Swadesh Bandhab Samiti, with Aswinikumar as president and his colleague and close associate Satischandra Chatterji as secretary. The nearest thing to a mass organisation produced by the swadeshi age, information about its structure and working fortunately happens to be unusally extensive.[237]

a member of the Anti-Circular Society, and later on a close associate of Rabindranath at Santiniketan.

[232] *Bande Mataram*, 26 February 1907. Government of E. Bengal and Assam to Government of India (Home), No. 514T, 14 April 1907, Enclosure II—Home Public Progs A. May 1907, n. 169.

[233] *Bande Mataram*, 26 February 1907.

[234] See below, Chapter VIII.

[235] *Bengalee*, 30 April 1908.

[236] 'Indicus', *Aswini Kumar Dutta: A Vindication of His Life and Conduct* (1909)—Introduction, pp. vi-vii. Saratkumar Roy, *Mahatma Aswinikumar* (1926), pp. 61-74.

[237] My main sources for the following account, apart from numerous

The Central Samiti in Barisal town started with 18 members in August 1905 (the original Karmi-Sangha); this rose to 41 in 1906[238] and 73 on the eve of the ban in 1908.[239] It organised meetings, usually at Raj Bahadur's haveli (twenty-five of them in course of the first year of the movement, plus some fifty street lectures)[240] till these were stopped for a time by the Seditious Meetings Ordinance and Act; administered collective swadeshi vows to groups of barbers, washermen, boatmen and other humble folk;[241] had at its disposal four paid and twenty-five unpaid swadeshi preachers

stray references in newspapers, Police Abstracts and Fortnightly Reports are (i) First Annual Report of the Swadesh Bandhab Samiti, reprinted in *Bengalee*, 14 September 1906. (ii) Letter from Government of E. Bengal and Assam, proposing the deportation of Aswinikumar Dutta. No. 206C, 3 July 1907—Home Political Progs A, August 1907, n. 106. (iii) Dossier of State Prisoner Aswinikumar Dutta—Home Political Progs Deposit, November 1909, n. 6. (iv) Resume of Affairs in Bakargunj for 1907, drawn up by district magistrate Hughes-Buller —Home Political Progs A, April 1908, n. 24. (v) Note on the Swadesh Bandhab Samiti by R. Nathan, D.O. No. 1620S, 9 December 1908, with enclosed Rules of Swadesh Bandhab Samiti (Baisakh 1313), Rules of Vigilance Committee of Volunteers, and details about the Dumartalla Village Yubak Samiti—Home Political Progs Deposit, April 1909, n. 2. (vi) Supplementary Report on Samitis in Bakargunj District, containing History of the Second Year of the Swadeshi Movement, 22 Sravana 1313-14 (in translation); Second and Third Annual Proceedings of the Swadesh Bandhab Sammilani; and translation of the Proceedings of the Swadesh Bandhab Samiti Meetings—Home Political Progs Deposit, July 1909, n. 13. (vii) Biographies of Aswinikumar Dutta—by 'Indicus' (*Aswinikumar Dutta : A Vindication of His Life and Conduct*—1909); Surendranath Sen (*Aswinikumar Dutta*—n.d); Saratkumar Roy (*Mahatma Aswinikumar*, 1926); and Sureschandra Gupta (*Aswinikumar*, 1928).

[238] "First Annual Report of Swadesh Bandhab Samiti"—*Bengalee*, 14 September 1906.

[239] Supplementary Report on Samitis in Bakargunj District, pp. 12-13 —Home Political Progs Deposit, July 1909, n. 13.

[240] *Bengalee*, 14 September 1906.

[241] Abstract of Reports from E. Bengal and Assam, during second half of January and first half of February 1907—Home Public Progs A, April 1907, n. 207-10. *Bengalee*, 27 January, 5 February 1907.

for the countryside;[242] brought out pamphlets;[243] and financed and controlled a weekly newspaper (the *Barisal Hitaishi*, edited by Durgamohan Sen) and Mukunda Das's jatra party.[244] It also ran a swadeshi stores, a weaving school and (not very successfully, it seems) a gymnasium.[245] Records of 28 meetings of samiti members between January 1907 and December 1908 have survived; these indicate the organisation to have been in frequent contact with leaders of other East Bengal districts in connection with matters of common interest, like communal riots or the stand to be taken vis-a-vis the Congress split.[246]

The Swadesh Bandhab developed an impressive network of village branches, and groups of volunteers were attached to both the Central Samiti and the local units. The *Rules of the Swadesh Bandhab Samiti* drawn up in Baisakh 1313 (April-May 1906) envisaged the setting-up of village associations with three departments : arbitration; "practice of swadeshi vow and work" (i.e. regular meetings, supply of swadeshi goods and encouragement of local crafts, and enforcement of boycott); and "work for the welfare of the public" —sanitation, physical and moral training, prohibition and education. Each department was expected to send quarterly reports to the Central Samiti in Barisal.[247] Such reports, we

[242] Saratkumar Roy, *op cit.*, p. 130. Supplementary Report on Samitis, op. cit., p. 25.

[243] Thus on the eve of the Barisal conference, two pamphlets written in easy Bengali were brought out in 10,000 copies—*Bengalee*, 21 September 1905; Priyanath Guha, *Yojnabhanga* (1907), p. 8. In August 1907 Jadugopal Dhar was distributing a pamphlet named *Arya bhumi* (Land of the Aryas) in the north-west part of the district—Resume of Events in 1907, para 22—Home Political Progs A, April 1908, n. 24.

[244] R. Nathan's Note on Swadesh Bandhab Samiti, Report on Samitis in Dacca Division, p. 73. Home Political Progs Deposit, April 1909, n. 2. For Mukunda Das, see also pp. 301-2 above.

[245] *Op. cit. Bengalee*, 14 September 1906. The relative neglect of physical culture by this samiti has been already noted—see p. 354.

[246] Proceedings of the Swadesh Bandhab Samiti meetings—Home Political Progs Deposit, July 1909, n. 13, pp. 30-47.

[247] Samitis in the Bakargunj District, No. 18—Home Political Progs Deposit, April 1909, n. 2.

are told, came in from 163 village associations during the first year of the Samiti;[248] in February 1909 the police listed 175 local branches attached to the Swadesh Bandhab.[249] More detailed instructions regarding the second type of activity are given in the *Rules of Vigilance Committee of Volunteers*, found in a search at Banoripara. Apart from laying down the procedure for picketing and social boycott,[250] the rules stipulate: "The volunteers should try hard and see that families within the jurisdiction of the vigilance committee are attracted towards swadeshi things and their own country. They should try to supply swadeshi cloth and karkatch without profit to such families, and in the course of conversation recite patriotic tales from newspapers and history. They should see that the female members of those families should learn the use of handlooms. . ."[251]

During the winter of 1905-6, the building-up of this organisation proceeded side by side with preparations for the Barisal provincial conference. The second half of 1906 was largely filled with famine relief work, conducted with devotion and great organisational skill, and enhancing greatly the prestige and popularity of the Swadesh Bandhab and Aswinikumar personally among the masses.[252] The spring and summer of the following year saw volunteer activity at its height, climaxed by the "battle for Jhalakati"[253] and the show of strength on the night of 16 May by volunteers with lathis on hearing the rumour of a Muslim attack.[254] Along with such defence measures, an all-out attempt was also made about this time

[248] *Bengalee*, 14 September 1906.

[249] Supplementary Report, *op. cit.* Home Political Progs Deposit, July 1909, n. 13. p. 8.

[250] For these, cf. above, pp. 317, 321.

[251] Samitis in the Bakargunj District, No. 22—Home Political Progs Deposit, April 1909, n. 2.

[252] For details of famine relief work, so highly praised by Nivedita, cf. above, pp. 284-85.

[253] For volunteer "occupation" of Jhalakati and other important hats, see above, p. 318.

[254] Resume of Affairs in Bakargunj for 1907, paras 3-4—Home Political Progs A, April 1908, n. 24.

to win the Muslim peasantry for swadeshi.[255] The ban on meetings and other repressive measures in the latter half of 1907 brought about a certain fall in tempo, but social boycott remained as effective as ever.[256] Already by August 1906, all but one out of the 56 shops selling foreign liquor in Bakargunj district had been closed down.[257] Imports of British goods as a whole fell from 42,000 to 26,000 maunds.[258] Indigenous crafts flourished, and the Hindu weavers of Gaurnadi informed the subdeputy collector "that they had no need of government help, and asked after Babus Bepin Chandra Pal and Aswinikumar Dutta, saying that as long as they were going strong they needed no assistance".[259] A Swadesh Bandhab agent named Basantakumar Ghatak made a notable attempt during 1907-8 to start primary national schools in Barisal villages.[260] In its first annual report, the samiti claimed to have set up 89 arbitration committees and settled 523 cases through them.[261] Another 500 such cases were reported in the *Second and Third Annual Proceedings of the Swadesh Bandhab Sammilani* presented before the conference of August 1908—of which two involved suits worth Rs 90,000 and Rs 65,000.[262] The *History of the Second Year of the Swadeshi Movement* (22 Sravana 1313-14) cited the example of Terachar village, "inhabited by Namasudras", which had been "saved from the dreadful jaws of litigation. They have even given up registering their documents. They execute documents

255 See below, pp. 387-88.
256 For details of social boycott, see above, pp. 321-22.
257 *Bengalee*, 14 September 1906.
258 Fortnightly Report from East Bengal and Assam, No. 444T of 14 March 1907, para 3—Home Public Progs A, April 1907, n. 208. The estimate was made by the local superintendent of police.
259 Confidential Diary of the District Magistrate of Bakargunj, for week ending 6 July 1907, para 3—Home Political Progs A, August 1907, n. 110.
260 Report on National Schools, 8 June 1908, p. 33—Home Political Progs A, March 1909, n. 10-11. See above, pp. 179-80.
261 *Bengalee*, 14 September 1906.
262 Supplementary Report, *op. cit.*, No. 10—Home Political Progs Deposit, July 1909, n. 13.

by putting the thumb impressions in the presence of five mandals of the village. If anybody denies the execution of the document, he is subjected to social discipline and punished."[263]

All our sources testify that the movement in Bakargunj was not only effective but remarkably peaceful. Superintendent of police F. E. Kemp in a report dated 27 March 1908 admitted: "I would, however, note that I have not as yet received any information that the teachings of any of the samitis in the district enjoin on the members to use force."[264] Hemchandra Kanungo gives us a rather entertaining account of how Aswinibabu managed to get rid of Barin Ghosh and himself when they came to Barisal in the summer of 1906 with the bright idea of taking a pot-shot at some local officials.[265] There were occasional clashes over picketing and social boycott, but absolutely no trace for a long time of terrorist preparations. Only in 1908 do we hear of one or two branches of the Dacca Anushilan, and in particular of a group in Barisal town led by Brojomohan Institution teacher Satischandra Mukherji[266]—the Swami Pragnanananda of the later revolutionary movement. Yet right from the beginning repression was more intense in Bakargunj than anywhere else. Gurkhas terrorised Barisal town in the autumn of 1905;[267] punitive police were stationed at Banoripara and Madhabpassa in the winter of 1905-6[268] and Uzirpur and Jhalakati in

263 *Ibid*, No. 9.

264 D.O. from F. E. Kemp to District Magistrate R. B. Hughes-Buller, 27 March 1908—Samitis in the Bakargunj District, No. 17. Home Political Progs Deposit, April 1909, n. 2.

265 Hemchandra Kanungo, *op. cit.*, p. 152.

266 Samitis in the Bakargunj District, p. 51. Cf. also D. O. No. 1620S. 9 December 1908, from Dacca Commissioner R. Nathan to H. Le Mesurier—"It looks as though Pulinism was taking root at Barisal with the decline of Aswini and the rise of the more violent Satish..." *Ibid*, p. 70. Home Political Progs Deposit, April 1909, n. 2.

267 Reported in detail in contemporary newspapers—e.g. *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 22 November, 24 November 1905. For a full account, cf. Haridas and Uma Mukherji, *India's Fight for Freedom* (1958), pp. 111-20.

268 Fuller to Minto, 26 March 1906—Minto Papers, M 978.

1907;[269] Barisal provincial conference delegates were lathi-charged and the meeting itself dispersed next day;[270] there was constant harassment through swadeshi cases (twenty-five of them in a single year);[271] meetings were banned for long periods under the Seditious Meetings Ordinance and Act; sedition charges were brought against Durgamohan Sen, Mukunda Das, Liakat Husain and Abdul Gafur; and eventually in the winter of 1908-9 Aswinikumar and Satischandra Chatterji were deported[272] and the whole organisation banned.

Evidently what had alarmed the authorities was the extent of mass support the Swadesh Bandhab seemed to be acquiring. Villagers in certain areas had stopped paying the chawkidari tax.[273] "In two years' endeavour Babu Aswinikumar Dutta and his band of agitators have succeeded in instilling a spirit of hostility to government and hatred of the Europeans into the great majority of the Hindus, and they are now making deliberate efforts to excite similar feelings among the ignorant and turbulent Mahomedan peasantry, by appealing to their fanaticism and lawlessness"—stated the government of E. Bengal and Assam while urging the deportation of Aswinikumar in July 1907.[274] In the previous month, district magistrate Hughes-Buller had reported that Aswinikumar was "associating himself closely with low class Musul-

[269] Government of E. Bengal and Assam to Government of India (Home), No. 206C, 3 July 1907, para 7—Home Political Progs A, August 1907, n. 106.

[270] The most detailed account of this is given in Priyanath Guha, *Yojnabhanga* (1907)

[271] History of the Second Year of the Swadeshi Movement (22 Sravana 1313-14)—Home Political Progs Deposit, July 1909, n. 13, p. 22.

[272] The district magistrate of Bakargunj and the government of E. Bengal and Assam had wanted Aswinikumar Dutta to be deported as early as June-July 1907, but this had been vetoed at that time by Minto. Home Political Progs A, August 1907, n. 106.

[273] R. Nathan's Note on the Swadesh Bandhab Samiti—Home Political Progs Deposit, April 1909, n. 2, No. 26.

[274] No. 206C, 3 July 1907, para 4—*op. cit.*

mans in his present tour" of the district.[275] A "most audacious bid"[276] for Muslim support made at this time was the distribution by Liakat Husain and Abdul Gafur of an Urdu pamphlet declaring that loyalty to a Christian government could not form part of the duty of a good Muslim.[277] The district magistrate succinctly posed the "two alternatives" facing the government—"should the Muhammadans stand aloof from the Hindus, there is the constant fear that the pinprick persecution of the boycott will lead to acts of violence and civil commotion, as has happened elsewhere... On the other hand, should the fanaticism of the Muhammadans be excited by preachings from Liakat Husain and such itinerant preachers brought here by the agitators, neither I, as district officer, nor the government can contemplate the possible results with equanimity, and there is no knowing to what extent the infection may eventually spread."[278] Clearly the authorities preferred the first to the second, Jamalpur to Barisal—and so Ibrahim Khan of Red Pamphlet fame was let off with a warning[279] while Liakat Husain got three years for sedition, with Mr Hughes-Buller heaving "a sigh of

[275] Memorandum on Aswinikumar Dutta, 20 June 1907—*Ibid.*, Enclosure II.

[276] R. Nathan's Note, *op. cit.*, p. 72.

[277] The pamphlet, written by Liakat Husain, was entitled *Musalman dunya ka waste mustad aur kafir mat ho* (Musalmans don't go astray and don't turn infidels for the sake of the world). Prosecution of Liakat Husain and Abdul Gafur under Sec. 124 A, Indian Penal Code —Home Political Progs A, February 1908, n. 42.

[278] Memorandum on Aswinikumar Dutta, 20 June 1907—*op. cit.* Hughes-Buller here was unconsciously echoing his betters. "I am sorry to hear of the increasing friction between Hindus and Mohammadans in the North West and the Punjab. One hardly knows what to wish for; unity of ideas and action would be very dangerous politically, divergence of ideas and collision are administratively troublesome. Of the two the latter is the least risky, though it throws anxiety and responsibility upon those on the spot where the friction exists." Hamilton to Elgin, 7 May 1897. Quoted in A. K. Majumdar, *Advent of Independence* (1963), p. 344.

[279] See below, Chapter VIII.

relief at the removal of his troublesome presence".[280]

The Swadesh Bandhab collapsed with surprising rapidity after the deportations and the ban on the organisation. Perhaps it had come to depend a little too much on the personality of a single leader—at least that is what Hemchandra Kanungo says he felt when he visited Barisal in 1906;[281] and in October 1907, when Aswinikumar had gone to Kurseong for a month's vacation, there was a time of "peace and quietness", as "in his absence the other leaders were like a ship without a rudder".[282] An open and somewhat loose organisation, without the discipline and systematic training which the Dacca Anushilan gave to its members, the Swadesh Bandhab could not survive, unlike the former, as a secret society. Survival as an underground mass organisation was also not possible, as despite most sincere efforts, the limits of the bhadralok community had not really been transcended even in Barisal. The village samitis, after all, were not peasant associations; they consisted "of the bhadralok of the village",[283] while the 73 members of the Central Samiti of Barisal town included 7 zamindars, 19 pleaders and 15 teachers.[284] Hughes-Buller emphasised the rôle of zamindars and their amlas,[285] pleaders ("for the most part thoroughly disloyal"), and school-masters (who were "anti-government almost to a man") in spreading the movement. The volunteers consisted "chiefly of students, ex-students, and young Hindus (chiefly educated or semieducated) who have found no employment. Pleaders' and Mukhtears' muharris and the younger members of the legal profession also provide many re-

280 No. 675C, 11 February 1908—Confidential Diary of Bakargunj Magistrate R. Hughes-Buller for the month of January 1908. Home Political Progs A, April 1908. n. 24.

281 Hemchandra Kanungo, *op. cit.*, p. 150.

282 Resume of Affairs in Bakargunj for 1907, para 15—Home Political Progs A, April 1908, n. 24.

283 *Ibid*, para 27.

284 Supplementary Report of Samitis in the Bakargunj District, pp. 12-13—Home Political Progs Deposit, July 1909, n. 13.

285 For zamindars generally, cf. below, Chapter X.

cruits."[286] Swadesh Bandhab propaganda, we are told, included the spreading of a rumour that "government contemplates abolishing the rights of all tenure-holders throughout the district".[287] Such intermediate tenures were particularly numerous in Bakargunj, with subinfeudation creating from eight to twenty grades between the proprietor and the actual cultivator. The holders were mostly higher caste Hindus (Brahmins, Kayasthas and Baidyas), "who form somewhat too numerous a proportion of the total population in the sadar subdivision... The rapid increase in the price of rice has contributed to make their position precarious." In 1918 the *District Gazetteer* found this bhadralok community concentrated in the thanas of Gaurnadi, Jhalakati, Swarupkati, Barisal and Nalchiti.[288] These five police stations had supplied more than 1500 out of the district's 2000-odd volunteers in 1907[289]—a coincidence too close to have been accidental.

The Madaripur subdivision forming the south-eastern section of the neighbouring district of Faridpur closely resembled Bakargunj, with its multiplicity of intermediate tenures[290] and numerous high and middle English schools[291]—and this area too was a political storm-centre, with seven swadeshi cases pending in November 1907.[292] Such tenures were few in number in the northern and western parts of Faridpur dis-

[286] Resume of Affairs in Bakargunj for 1907, paras 27-31—*op. cit.*
[287] Fortnightly Report on the Agitation in E. Bengal and Assam, No. 231C, 8/9 July 1907—Home Political Progs A, August 1907, n. 4.
[288] *Bakargunj District Gazetteer* (1918), pp. 94, 77-78.
[289] The Memorandum on the National Volunteer Movement in Bengal and E. Bengal and Assam, dated 11 September 1907, gave the following statistics of volunteer strength: Jhalakati 530, Swarupkati 333, Barisal 309, Nalchiti 236, Gaurnadi 104. The total for the district was placed at 2000. Home Political Progs Deposit, October 1907, n. 19—para 7, and Appendix B.
[290] *Faridpur District Gazetteer* (1925), Chapters II and X.
[291] In 1913-14 Madaripur subdivision had 15 private high and 19 private middle English schools—while in the entire United Provinces there were at that time only 14 high and 15 middle English schools away from the district headquarters. *Bengal District Administration Committee Report 1913-1914* (1915), p. 139.
[292] *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 6 November 1907.

trict, where big zamindaris predominated.[293] The movement there was weaker, and largely dependent on the whims of the zamindars; thus the important river port of Goalundo remained "the darkest spot" due to their apathy, despite the efforts to drive out Liverpool salt made by the Goalundo Hitaishini Sabha started by "some enthusiastic persons, mostly clerks".[294]

The outstanding leader of Faridpur was the pleader Ambicacharan Majumdar, enjoying a position in the district comparable in some ways to that of Aswinikumar, though Majumdar always remained much more closely connected with the moderates.[295] In October 1906 we hear of a Faridpur Swadeshi Samiti which had set up twelve village branches and was proceeding upon a plan to divide the district into circles, with a samiti organised for each. The circles would ignore panchayet divisions, and instead follow the somewhat unusual plan of attaching "peasant villages" to "advanced communities".[296] In July 1907 a Faridpur District Association was organised with Ambicacharan as president. It remained under moderate control, as a police report of December 1908 pointed out: "For a short time there seemed to be a fear that extreme views would prevail, and the influence of Ambikababu was receiving a setback, but probably owing to the outrages in other parts of the country Ambikababu regained his influence, and moderate views now prevail."[297] The association was fairly active, with some 200 members and twelve paid

293 *Faridpur District Gazetteer*, Chapter X.

294 "Swadeshi at Faridpur"—*Bengalee*, 3 October 1906; Cf. also, *Ibid*, 28 June 1906.

295 Thus he is said to have attacked critics of Surendranath as Bibhisans (traitors) at a Dacca meeting on September 1906. E. Bengal and Assam Police Abstract No. 25, 6 October 1906—Home Public Progs A, December 1906, n. 144-48. Majumdar presided over the Lucknow Congress of 1916.

296 *Bengalee*, 3 October 1906.

297 Samitis in the Faridpur District—Report on Samitis in the Dacca Division, Part IV, p. 136. Home Political Progs Deposit, April 1909, n. 2.

preachers (three of them Muslim) in 1908; it made a notable effort in particular in the field of primary education, and was running 25 such schools in 1910.[298] Some efforts—not very successful, it seems—were made to win the Namasudras for swadeshi; comprising more than half of Faridpur's Hindu population, they had, according to the *District Gazetteer*, a tradition of solidarity against the upper castes.[299] Debiprasanna Raychaudhuri in his presidential address to the Faridpur district conference of March 1908 laid special emphasis on the need for work among the Muslim and Namasudra peasantry.[300] But the gentry bias persisted in Faridpur as elsewhere—the local leaders had strongly opposed a government village survey in November 1906 which was trying to record the rights of the tenants.[301]

Political activity of a more militant variety had its chief centre in Madaripur, where in November 1905 headmaster Kaliprasanna Dasgupta refused to punish his students at the behest of the government, organised a teachers' conference to protest against the Carlyle Circular, and issued a fiery and moving appeal: "Let us teachers toil and endure like a (sic) poor soldier fighting for his country...let us teachers turn weavers, agriculturists and shopkeepers of Indian goods."[302] A volunteer movement developed in the district in 1907, with the Ishan Institution of Faridpur town providing many recruits.[303] This was the Brati Samiti, started in 1906 as a famine relief body, but soon becoming for a time a formidable extremist organisation. It gave physical training in lathi, spear and wooden sword to its members; enforced the

[298] *Dawn*, March, April 1910. Cf. also p. 180 above.

[299] *Faridpur District Gazetteer*, Chapter III. In 1921 the district had 815,634 Hindus (36 per cent of the total population), of whom 411,467 were Namasudras.

[300] *Nabya Bharat*, Chaitra 1314 (March-April 1908).

[301] *Bengalee*, 21 November 1906.

[302] *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 8 and 13 November 1905. Kaliprasanna was compelled to resign from his Madaripur post; he later became headmaster of the Mymensingh National School.

[303] IB File No. 447/1908—*op. cit.*, HFM(B) No. 63.

boycott in the local marts; organised a great lathi display on 17 October 1907; and was even rumoured to be storing arms. Though originally sponsored by Ambicacharan and other Faridpur pleaders, the Brati, we are told, had passed into the hands of Brahmomohan Ghosh, "a dismissed subinspector of police and a very dangerous character". But meanwhile the Dacca Anushilan had set up branches in Madaripur (four of them in the Palong police station, and eight altogether in the district), and "the great influence and popularity of Pulin Behari Das of Dacca injured the organisation of the lesser captain". Brahmomohan himself left Faridpur to join Pulin at Dacca, and the Brati Samiti as an independent organisation had become "practically nonexistent" even before the ban of January 1909.[304]

In the huge district of Mymensingh—the largest in India[305] —the swadeshi movement had three important centres in Mymensingh town and its environs, Kishoregunj subdivision and the Tangail region. The early moderate agitation against the partition had attained its greatest strength in this district, mainly because of the active support of Maharaja Surjyakanta Acharyya Chaudhuri of Muktagacha. The Mymensingh Association had then organised numerous meetings (more than forty in course of the second week of January 1904),[306] as well as memorials—about which the association's secretary, the local pleader Anathbandhu Guha, stipulated that "It is desirable that petitions from villages should be in Bengali".[307]

[304] R. Nathan's Note on the Brati Samiti (14 December 1908)—Report on Samitis in the Dacca Division, Part IV, pp. 129-31. Home Political Progs Deposit, April 1909, n. 2.

[305] Area 6300 square miles, population (1911 census), 4,526.422—*Mymensingh District Gazetteer*, (1917), Chapter I.

[306] *Sanjibani*, 14 January 1904—RNP(B) for week ending 23 January 1904.

[307] This rather tactless remark, contained in the instructions issued by Anathbandhu Guha on 5 January 1904, was frequently quoted by officials to prove that the movement was no more than an engineered one. Note by Mymensingh Magistrate W. B. Thomson. No. 169J, 5 February 1904, enclosed with Bengal Government Letter No. 2556J, 6 April 1904—Home Public Progs A, February 1905, n. 157. Also

Thirty-nine delegates from Mymensingh were included in the standing committee set up by the Town Hall meeting of 7 August 1905; only Calcutta had more representatives.[308] The later, more radical phases of the movement also at first got considerable zamindari assistance, in particular from Brojendrakishore Raychaudhuri of Gauripur—the biggest single donor to the National Council of Education, who also allowed the Suhrid Samiti to set up a training centre on his estate at Dulania[309] and many of whose officials[310] actively promoted the boycott. This dependence on landlords and their amlas was rooted in the social realities of Mymensingh, where the bulk of the land was held by a few big zamindars; intermediate tenures were less developed here, and many among the bhadralok had to depend for their living on ill-paid jobs as naib or muharri in zamindari estates. The district also was educationally rather backward, with a literacy rate of only 4.6 per cent in 1911 (as compared to 15 per cent in Dacca and 8 per cent in Bakargunj).[311] Another negative factor of course was communal tension—the riots at Iswargunj in 1906 and Jamalpur in 1907 being at once the most serious of our period and the most clearly agrarian in character.[312] These factors help to explain why Mymensingh, des-

quoted in Enclosure A of Report on the Agitation against the Partition of Bengal, 25 January 1906—Home Public Progs A, June 1906, n. 175.

308 *Bengalec,* 8 August 1905. This huge standing committee (226 members), however, seems to have done precisely nothing.

309 R. Nathan's Note on the Suhrid Samiti, 14 December 1908, para 4—Report on Samitis in Dacca Division, Part III. Home Political Progs Deposit, April 1909, n. 2.

310 Like Kumudinikanta Banerji at Gauripur or Jogendrakumar Guha Thakurta at Netrakona. From Sunamgunj (Sylhet) a naib of the Gauripur estate described himself as writing "with great difficulty, with a bad, old and worn out swadeshi nib". Conduct of the Zamindars of Gauripur in Connection with Political Agitation in the Mymensingh district—Letter from Government of E. Bengal and Assam No. 845C, 6 January 1908. Home Political Progs A, February 1908, n. 102—pp. 62-65.

311 *Mymensingh District Gazetteer,* Chapters VII, X, XIII.

312 For a detailed analysis of these riots, cf. Chapter VIII below.

pite its early promise, never became a Barisal. Already in March 1907, a fortnightly report was drawing a contrast between the two districts—while bideshi imports had declined sharply in Bakargunj, in Mymensingh 11 cloth dealers imported similar amounts in 1905 and 1906, and 12 salt and 8 sugar merchants actually showed an increase of 5000 and 3000 maunds respectively for the latter year. "It is asserted that the maharaja of Mymensingh has withdrawn his injunctions against the sale and purchase of British goods in the bazaars on his estates."[313] The 1907 riots frightened many zamindars into making their peace with the authorities, and in August 1907 it is reported that "The Mymensingh district has been extremely quiet, no doubt owing to the influence of the zamindars who were all present in large numbers to meet the Lieutenant-Governor".[314] The quietness was partly deceptive, as the later activity of terrorist groups was to show, but, so far as the public movement was concerned, it is a striking fact that only one case of interference with the sale of English goods was recorded in Mymensingh for the period April 1907-January 1909 (as against 15 in Bakargunj, 12 in Tippera, 9 in Faridpur and 5 in Dacca).[315]

An exception should be made for the movement in the Kishoregunj area, illumined in the *Autobiography of an Unknown Indian*. The first town in Bengal to respond to *Sanjibani*'s boycott call,[316] Kishoregunj owed its political importance not to a zamindar or pleader, but to Surendranath Sen, headmaster of the local national school. "A person of some force of character and with the gift of talk", Surendranath Sen's "precept and example have stirred the local pleaders and a number of small local Hindu landholders into a fervour of seditious agitation which, I think, exceeds any-

[313] Fortnightly Report from E. Bengal and Assam, No. 444T of 14 March 1907—Home Public Progs A, April 1907, n. 208.

[314] Fortnightly Report from E. Bengal and Assam, No. 359C of 12 August 1907—Home Political Progs A, September 1907, n. 44.

[315] Home Political Progs Deposit, August 1909, n. 26—Appendix III.

[316] Nirad C. Chaudhuri, *The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian* (1951) Book II, Chapter 3. For Kishoregunj's claim to precedence in this respect, see above, pp. 340-41.

thing that exists outside some of the worst places in the Bakargunj district. The two principal pleaders and a small talukdar are the three principal tools of this Surendranath Sen"—stated an official in October 1907.[317] The government of the new province wanted him to be deported along with Pulinbihari Das, Bhupeschandra Nag, Satischandra Chatterji and Aswinikumar Dutta; the India government however felt the evidence insufficient.[318] Kishoregunj played host to the second Mymensingh district conference in April 1908, in which the extremists clearly predominated, with Kaliprasanna Dasgupta in charge of volunteers and Aurobindo as a principal speaker.[319] Surendranath Banerji in contrast had been the guest of honour the previous year, in the conference at Mymensingh town as well as at the Tangail subdivisional conference which had followed it.[320]

Apart from some Anushilan branches,[321] Mymensingh district had two main samitis—the Suhrid and the Sadhana Samaj. The latter, a splinter group from the Suhrid Samiti set up in 1907, was "more closely the agent of the leaders of the agitation in Mymensingh", but seems otherwise to have resembled the parent society in outlook and nature of activity.[322] Anathbandhu Guha, the head of the local bar, was formally patron of both the societies, but the real leadership was exercised by younger and more militant men—Kaliprasanna Dasgupta of the Mymensingh National School in the Sadhana and Kedarnath Chakrabarti and Brojendralal Ganguli in the Suhrid.[323] Home department files preserve a printed report issued by the Suhrid Samiti, covering the years 1307-13

[317] Government of E. Bengal and Assam to Government of India (Home) No. 4370SB, 9 December 1908—Home Political Progs A, December 1908, n. 137.

[318] *Ibid.*

[319] *Bengalee*, 9 April 1908.

[320] *Ibid*, 30 April, 3 May 1907.

[321] Home Political Progs Deposit, August 1909, n. 26—Appendix II.

[322] R. Nathan's Note on the Sadhana Samaj, 14 December 1908—Report on Samitis in Dacca Division, Part III. Home Political Progs Deposit, April 1909. n. 2.

[323] Report on Samitis in Dacca Division, Part III, *op. cit.*

(1900-6). Established originally as a centre for the physical and moral training of young men, it started giving special attention from its second year to "the sole use of country-made goods", and organised annual Shivaji festivals from 1902 onwards. Its leaders established close connections with Sarala Debi, and her influence was evident from 1904 in the Birastami and Pratapaditya festivals started by the samiti. Sarala attended the second Pratapaditya festival in April 1905; volunteers greeted her with a Bande Mataram salute and staged the *Ananda math* drama. The samiti had by this time a regular system of training for its members. There were lectures, discussion meeting once a week, as well as physical culture and drill.[324] The library of the samiti had 230 books when the police raided it in November 1908; these included lives of Cromwell, Washington and Napoleon, *Condemned as a Nihilist, Nabya Japan* and several books on Ramkrishna and Vivekananda.[325] The oath the volunteers had to take emphasised moral virtues, swadeshi and defence of caste and religion. It also stated that "Every man should show honour and love to the leaders of the samiti"—much less rigorous than the later Anushilan demand for unquestioning obedience.[326]

Like similar societies elsewhere, the Suhrid Samiti vastly enlarged its range of activities in the 1905 days. It seems to have been one of the first to make bonfires of English cloth.[327] Branches were established at Sakhuai, Muktagacha, Fulpur, Gugudia, Tangail, Sherpur and Nandina, as well as outside Mymensingh district in Dacca (the Vikrampur area), Sylhet, Tippera and Noakhali.[328] Eight preachers were appointed for

[324] Second Supplementary Report on Samitis in the Dacca Division—Home Political Progs Deposit, October 1909, n. 1.

[325] D.O. No. 936, Mymensingh, 28 January 1909, from J. R. Blackwood to R. Nathan. Paper No. 7—Report on Samitis in Dacca Division, Part III, *op. cit.*

[326] *Ibid*, Exhibit XV and Paper No. 11.

[327] *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 22 August 1905.

[328] R. Nathan's Note on the Suhrid Samiti, 14 December 1908—Report on Samitis in Dacca Division, Part III, *op. cit.*

the villages; special use was made of magic-lantern lectures (particularly by Brojendralal Ganguli, who was also a talented singer), volunteers hawked swadeshi goods from door to door;[329] and a number of palli samitis were set up—about which Nathan commented: "The family resemblance to Aswini Kumar Dutta's village samitis of the Bakargunj district is noteworthy."[330] Sarala Debi still remained a powerful influence, writing frequently from Lahore to Kedarnath Chakrabarti, secretary of the samiti; and the visits of Aurobindo, Bepinchandra and Subodh Mullick in May 1906 further contributed to the "sinister political character of the society". Meanwhile the physical training of Suhrid members had been raised to "a par with that of the Dacca Anushilan Samiti". Most volunteers had daggers and sword-sticks, "it is reported that many have unlicensed revolvers", and the "so-called agricultural farm" at Dulania near the Garo foothills on land leased from Brojendrakishore, set up ostensibly to teach farming to bhadralok youths, had really become a centre for martial training.[331] Thus in structure as well as in nature of activity the Suhrid Samiti spanned the gulf between the Swadesh Bandhab of Barisal and the Anushilan of Dacca.

In Dacca district, the swadeshi movement had a natural base in the Vikrampur area with its bhadralok concentration. Munshigunj surpassed even Madaripur in the number of its high schools,[332] and together with the neighbouring Srinagar area, it supplied "nearly one-third of the subordinate native

[329] Report of Suhrid Samiti for 1312—Home Political Progs Deposit, October 1909, n. 1.

[330] R. Nathan's Note, *op. cit.*, para 2.

[331] *Ibid*, paras 3, 4.

[332] *Bengal District Administration Committee Report 1913-1914* (1915), p. 139. Dacca district had a literacy rate of 15 per cent, the corresponding figure for Howrah (the most advanced mufassil area in this respect in the old province) being 11.5 per cent in 1901 (*Howrah District Gazetteer 1909*, p. 142). That such percentages should be considered high is of course an eloquent comment on the benefits of one hundred and fifty years of British rule.

officials in the government offices of Bengal".[333] At the same time, Dacca was the fountain-head of Muslim separatist politics, with its Nawab Salimulla—undoubtedly held in high regard by most of his coreligionists,[334] and its madrasa, which produced men like Maulvi Samiruddin.[335] In October 1906, official reports estimated the strength of the rival swadeshi and Muslim rallies in Dacca town on partition day at 4,000 and 25,000 respectively. The corresponding figures for Barisal, according to the same source, were 2,500 and 500.[336]

In the winter of 1903-4, protest meetings and petitions had been organised by the Dacca People's Association, led by the local pleader Anandachandra Ray.[337] Like similar moderate bodies elsewhere, the association failed to rise up to the challenge of the post-1905 days. Plans for a district organisation drawn up in February 1907[338] seem to have remained mainly on paper, and the *Bande Mataram* of 2 August 1907 spoke bitterly about a "refrigeration" of swadeshi in Dacca, due to moderate leaders like Anandachandra Ray having "taken to their beds".

The really virile Dacca movement began in September 1906, when Pal and Mitter visited the town and inaugurated a branch of the Calcutta Anushilan there. The nucleus was composed of eighty youths, to whom Mitter administered the oath of the society; the leader was Pulinbehari Das, an

[333] H. H. Risley's Note of 7 February 1904, para 2—Home Public Progs A, February 1905, n. 155.

[334] Even the nationalist weekly *The Mussalman* usually fought shy of a direct attack on Salimulla, and admitted that, despite his shortcomings, the latter was still respected by most E. Bengal Muslims. Editorial entitled "Causes of East Bengal Riots", 24 May 1907.

[335] For Samiruddin's role in the Mymensingh riots, see below, Chapter VIII.

[336] Abstract of Reports during First Half of October 1906 from E. Bengal and Assam, para 1—Home Public Progs A, December 1906, n. 310-11.

[337] *Dacca Prakash*, 27 December 1903—RNP (B) for week ending 2 January 1904.

[338] *Bengalee*, 1 March 1907.

expert in lathi, sword and dagger play, who had been trained by Murtaza at Sarala Debi's 'akhara' in Calcutta.[339] With startling rapidity this branch association—soon for all practical purposes an indpendent society—far surpassed the parent body. Mitter's original samiti in Calcutta virtually confined itself to physical culture; its activist offshoot—the group led by Aurobindo and his brother—spread the revolutionary message through the pages of the *Yugantar* with intellectual brilliance and courage, but displayed remarkable incompetence and foolhardiness in the sphere of actual work. Numerically, too, it seems to have been far smaller than the Dacca body.[340] What made the Dacca Anushilan so remarkable was its combination of considerable membership, iron discipline and the capacity for quiet yet effective work.

The goal from the beginning was "to effect a revolution and overthrow the British government", and the rules of thc samiti explicitly stated: "It is impossible to thoroughly eschew foreign articles unless the foreign people and foreign king are first driven out."[341] Hence the emphasis on physical training, discipline and secrecy. The *Anushilan Regulations and Drill-book*, discovered by the police more or less accidentally in September 1907, began with an incendiary poem —"Come today who is ready to die". It included an elaborate system of oaths—adya and antya (primary and final), one of which stated: "I shall obey the leaders without opposition. I shall never keep anything secret from the leader and shall never speak anything but true (sic) to him." There was a system of supervision through secretaries and paridarshaks, who were expected to keep a diary, recording week by week the "progress or failure—in the gymnastics, in education and also in character" of the members placed under their charge. Details of drill and physical training with

[339] H. A. Salkeld's Report on the Anushilan Samiti, Dacca, 10 December 1908—para 5. Home Political Progs Deposit, April, 1909 n. 2—Part I.

[340] See below, Chapter IX.

[341] H. A. Salkeld's Report, paras 1, 5—*op. cit.*

dagger, sword and lathi were laid down in this manual, complete with numerous technical terms which the police felt might have been borrowed from Japanese.[342] In course of a later search the police discovered an essay in Pulinbehari Das's handwriting on "The Total Surrender of One's Personal Independence in the Hands of a Leader." Even in America, this interesting essay argued, real power rested with a few; Japan had been successful due to the Mikado's leadership, while lack of unity had ruined the nihilist cause in Russia. "The democratic principle cannot hold good in matters relating to the army, because in these affairs speediness is the secret of success." "The proper time for work passes by and the whole thing falls to the ground if the consent of everyone has to be taken."[343]

A number of pleaders in Dacca town patronised the samiti in its early years, the foremost of them being Anandachandra Chakrabàrti, the extremist leader.[344] There were indications, however, in the summer of 1908 that the respectable leaders were backing out—"the estrangement really began after the Barrah dacoity in June".[345] In the meantime "Captain General" Pulinbehari Das and his able assistant Bhupeschandra Nag had built up a really formidable organisation, with no less than 119 branches in the Dacca district by December 1908—16 in Dacca town, 18 in Dacca Sadar Mufassil, 21 in Narayangunj, 41 in Munshigunj and 23 in Manikgunj.[346] Already in 1907, there were samiti branches also in Mymensingh, Faridpur, Bakargunj,

[342] Anushilan Regulations and Drill Book, enclosure 3-5 to Dacca Magistrate B. C. Allen's Report on Anushilan Samiti, 21 October 1907. Home Political Progs Deposit, April 1909, n. 2—Part I.

[343] H. A. Salkeld's Report, para 5—*Ibid.*

[344] Report of Kotwali Police Station Subinspector to Dacca Superintendent of Police, 12 October 1907. Letter from Government of E. Bengal and Assam to Government of India (Home), No. 767C of 28 November 1907—Home Political Progs A, February 1908, n. 70-71.

[345] History Sheet of Pulinbehari Das, para 8.—Home Political Progs A, February 1909, n. 137.

[346] Appendix to H. A. Salkeld's Report, *op. cit.*

Tippera, Sylhet and Dinajpur,[347] and soon it was spreading into West Bengal and even beyond—always retaining, however, its centralised and disciplined character. National schools formed major recruiting centres, particularly Wari in Dacca town (where both Pulinbehari and Bhupeschandra were teachers, and a secret meeting of 300 volunteers was held in July 1907),[348] and a little later the Sonarang school, founded by Makhanlal Sen, a "hotbed of disloyalty and revolutionary principles".[349] Recruitment of boys of extremely tender age was a special feature of the samiti; thus a document seized by the police contained a special vow taken upon a "Kali Murti" with 15 signatures below it, "their ages ranging from 22 to 9, mostly below 15".[350] Authorities noted with alarm "that whereas a year or more ago only bhadralok youths became volunteers, now large and increasing numbers of low-class Hindus also join the samitis".[351] How far this represented a genuine extension of political consciousness, however, may be doubted. Police reports speak for instance of a Gangacharan Dutta, son of a cultivator, allegedly enticed away by an agent of Pulinbehari carrying a letter which promised food and clothing for those willing to sacrifice their lives for the samiti. "In the Barodi quarter, where the Nag family is all-powerful, the progress of the organisation among low-class Hindus has been most marked."[352]

Open mass work of the type conducted by the Swadesh Bandhab or (in its early years) the Suhrid—magic-lantern lectures, village reconstruction, arbitration courts, etc.—seems in fact to have had relatively little appeal to the members of the Dacca Anushilan. No attempt was ever made, so far as I know, to break through to the Muslim half of the

[347] Home Political Progs Deposit, August 1909, n. 26, Appendix II.
[348] H. A. Salkeld's Report, paras 6, 13, *op. cit.*
[349] IB File No. 117/13—An Account of National Schools in Bengal, HFM(B) No. 65.
[350] History Sheet of Pulinbehari Das, para 3—*op. cit.*.
[351] *Ibid*, para 7.
[352] H. A. Salkeld's Report, para 7.

population of the district. The boycott, of course, was enforced fairly effectively—"At first open boycott by bands of youthful lathials was the order of the day. Of late, however, there has been no open violence because the boycott movement appears to have been effective, especially in parts like Bikrampur, where generally speaking hardly any foreign goods are now sold, but where those who still deal in non-swadeshi articles are subjected to a well-organised social persecution."[353] But otherwise the samiti "was intended to work very secretly and quietly, without any collision with the authorities until the deeply laid plans were fully matured".[354] The first brush with the government in fact came about rather accidentally, due to two clashes between the volunteers and Dacca Muslims in September and November 1907. In the arrests which followed, the police got hold of the Anushilan Regulations and Drill Book, as well as certain incriminating letters.[355] It is interesting, however, that as yet the authorities were far more worried by Barisal and Aswinikumar Dutta than by Dacca. Risley light-heartedly commented, after seeing Allen's report—"There is a strong flavour of the penny-dreadful about these papers... The Bengali student is a curious mixture of sexuality and hysteria and playing at conspiracy appeals to him enormously. If the secret societies can teach him discipline, I am not sure that the lesson will not be valuable."[356] The events of the next few months shattered this complacency, particularly the Barrah dacoity of June 1908[357] and the discovery the following November of the decapitated body of an Anushilan member suspected by the organisation to have been an infor-

353 *Ibid*, para 3.

354 *Ibid*, para 5.

355 B. C. Allen's Report, *op. cit.*

356 Note by H. H. Risley, 21 January 1908—Home Political Progs A, February 1908, n. 70-71.

357 This was the first big swadeshi dacoity. A detailed and vivid description is given in Nalinikishore Guha, *Banglay biplab-bad* (1954), pp. 102-7.

mer.[358] The "penny-dreadful" reports now came in useful, in persuading the secretary of state with his rather flexible liberal conscience to sanction deportation, a special bench to try political suspects without jury and a ban on the principal samitis.[359]

Given the social limits of the swadeshi movement, such a policy of repression could and did have as its inevitable effect the spread of the Anushilan model at the expense of the Swadesh Bandhab. What survived the winter of 1908-9 was, first, the highly centralised Dacca Anushilan, with its headquarters shifted to Calcutta in March 1910[360] and a new generation of extremely able leaders (Naren Sen, Rabi Sen, Amrita Hazra and 'Maharaj' Trailokya Chakrabarti); and second, a large number of scattered local secret societies, brought together a few years later by Jatindranath Mukherji but never really a single organisation, and given in official records the collective name of 'Yugantar'. 'Samiti' now meant revolutionary secret society and nothing more. The tradition of open mass work disappears for more than a decade, till its revival by the 'volunteers' of the Gandhian Congress.

[358] Political Crime since 1907—Home Political Progs Deposit, April 1911, n. 7.

[359] Home Political Progs A. February 1909, n. 113-36, 137-99.

[360] An Account of the Revolutionary Movement in Bengal, Part II. —HFM(B) No. 61.

Chapter Eight

HINDU-MUSLIM RELATIONS

I. Hindus and Muslims in Bengal

Hindu-Muslim relations posed the greatest challenge before the swadeshi movement, and ultimately proved its greatest failure. The campaign against an arbitrary administrative partition, launched in the name of the essential unity of the Bengali-speaking people, ended with the two socio-religious groups into which that community was almost equally divided[1] further apart from each other and more conscious of their mutual hostility than ever before.

Some amount of historical exploration is evidently necessary to understand the causes of this tragedy. The prejudices and illusions bred by half a century of tangled communal politics make an objective assessment very difficult even today. In dealing with Hindu-Muslim relations, historians (and politicians) have been usually influenced by one of two conflicting stereotypes. On the one hand there is the belief in a kind of golden age of Hindu-Muslim amity, deliberately destroyed by the British through their divide-and-rule techniques—with Curzon, Fuller and Minto figuring prominently among the villains of the piece. Such ideas were very frequently reflected in swadeshi speeches and pamphlets, Bepinchandra Pal for instance stating categorically in one

[1] The frequent administrative changes make an exact estimate a little difficult. Bengal prior to the 1905 partition had (according to the census of 1901) a population of 78.5 millions among whom 40.7 millions were Bengali-speaking. Muslims numbered 25.3 millions; they were mostly concentrated in East Bengal, but there were also quite a number in Bihar. *Imperial Gazetteer of India, Provincial Series—Bengal*, Volume I (1909), pp. 45-47, 51.

of his Madras lectures (7 May 1907) that "in the davs of my youth, not to go further before, we had no Hindu-Muhammadan problem in any part of India".[2] Biographical literature composed by nationalist leaders of this generation is full of nostalgic recollections of this idyllic past,[3] and as the full gravity of the communal danger came to be realised, the theory of past unity and British responsibility became a kind of Congress shibboleth. The polar opposite of this viewpoint is of course the famous (or notorious) 'two-nation theory', according to which Hindus and Muslims have always been entities fundamentally distinct in ethnic origin, language and culture as well as in religion. Given classic form in the Pakistan resolution of the Muslim League in 1940, this theory has had many non-Muslim adherents, more or less outspoken. From the days of Dufferin and Lord Cross, the separate "interests of the Mohammedans"[4] served as the most convenient British conservative pretext for obstructing or delaying political reform in India. Among the majority community too there has never been any lack of support for the view that India has been and must remain primarily the land of the Hindus, in which the Muslims are outsiders who must be kept in their place and should never be trusted because of their allegedly incorrigible communal proclivities.[5]

[2] Bepinchandra Pal, *The Contribution of Islam to the Indian Nation*, Madras, 7 May 1907. The full text of this speech is given in Home Political Progs A, December 1907, n. 44, Enclosure B (VI), p. 1.

[3] Surendranath Banerji, *A Nation in Making* (1925, 1963), p. 115. Krishnakumar Mitra, *Atmacharit* (1937), pp. 41-42. Bepinchandra Pal, *Sattar batsar—atmajivani* (1926, 1962), pp. 18-21, 103-8. Nripendrachandra Banerji, *At the Cross Roads* (1950), p. 9. J. C. Bagal, *Pramathanath Bose* (1955), p. 16.

[4] Lord Cross warned Lord Dufferin on 14 April 1887, after the latter had suggested a partial introduction of the elective principle—"I shall be very glad to consider any really matured plan, because I am quite alive to the present situation of affairs in India, but in any step that may be taken, the interests of the Mohammedans must be considered quite as much as the interests of the noisy Bengalee Baboo..." A. K. Majumdar, *Advent of Independence* (1963), p. 364.

[5] In 1937, three years before the Pakistan resolution of the Muslim

Both stereotypes oversimplify (though not probably to the same extent) the complex and changing realities of our subcontinent. Hindu-Muslim relations in fact seem to have varied greatly with region and time, and have always been bound up in an extremely complicated manner with socio-economic, political and cultural developments.

In pre-Plassey Bengal, the Muslims as the ruling community controlled the army and the machinery of criminal justice, and as amils and faujdars staffed the topmost rung of the administrative ladder. But the Hindu upper castes retained an important and in some ways even a preeminent position in society, since fully "nine-tenths of zamindaris were held by Hindus". Hindus also manned the qanungo offices and comprised the principal traders and bankers.[6] Till the change in the official language in the 1830s, Persian served as a kind of link between the educated of the two communities—it is noteworthy that Rammohun wrote his first major treatise in that language, and brought out the *Miral-ul-Akhbar* soon after the *Sambad Kaumudi*—but there was little in polite Bengali society to correspond to the rich Urdu-based Hindustani culture which had flourished in the heartland of the Mughal empire. The Ashraf community among the Muslims numbered relatively few in Bengal, and, perhaps uneasily conscious of living in "the backwoods of Indian Islam", often tried—right down to recent times—to flaunt its upcountry or foreign origins and Persian and Arabic learning at the cost of the more natural Bengali.[7] The Hindu gentry on its part might have resented occasionally the politically inferior position to which it had been relegated and disliked the iniqui-

League, Savarkar declared in a presidential address to the Hindu Mahasabha: "India cannot be assumed today to be a unitarian and homogeneous nation, but, on the contrary, there are two nations in the main, the Hindus and the Muslims." Quoted in S. Abid Hussain, *The Destiny of Indian Muslims* (1965), p. 108.

[6] Dr N. K. Sinha, *Economic History of Bengal from Plassey to the Permanent Settlement*, Volume II (1962), pp. 229-30.

[7] Dr Pradip Sinha, *Nineteenth Century Bengal: Aspects of Social History* (1965), pp. 50-57.

ties and harsh procedures of Muslim criminal justice;[8] such things (and not deliberate or systematic religious persecution, for which there is precious little evidence) probably help to explain the eagerness with which the bhadralok intelligentsia accepted in the nineteenth century the theory of the British having delivered Bengal from Muslim misrule.

But the vast majority of Bengali Muslims were peasants, in origin probably low-caste Hindus, Buddhists or simply people who had never been fully assimilated into the structure of Aryan society. Largescale forcible conversions in an area so far away as East Bengal was from the centres of Muslim political power appears most unlikely; much more important in all probability were Islam's power of attracting the socially oppressed through its egalitarian message and the influence of numerous Muslim holy men (Ibn Batuta for instance mentions the work of Shah Jalal in the Sylhet region).[9] It is at this popular level that considerable progress was made towards the evolution of a common culture based on the Bengali language and an amalgam of Hindu, Buddhist, Islamic and primitive folk rites. In 1909, the *Imperial Gazetteer* stated that "It was, until recently, the regular practice of low-class Muhammedans to join in the Durga Puja and other Hindu festivals"; it mentioned also Muslim consultation of Hindu almanacs, worship of Sitala and Manasa, use of vermilion, and joint offerings to village deities before the sowing or transplanting of rice seedlings.[10] Hindu peasants—and sometimes even zamindars—on their part offered their respects to the dargas of Muslim pirs (shrines of holy men).[11] Syncretist cults like the Satyapir

[8] 'Kajir Vichar'—the kazi's justice—has remained in Bengali synonymous with judicial arbitrariness.

[9] Kaji Abdul Odud, *Hindu-musalmaner birodh* (Hindu-Muslim Conflict) (1936), pp. 12-16. *Imperial Gazetteer of India, op. cit.*, p. 48. Haridas Mukherji, *Benoy sarkarer baithake* (1944), pp. 574-86.

[10] *Imperial Gazetteer of India, op. cit.*, pp. 48-49.

[11] Thus Krishnakumar Mitra has described how in his native village of Baghil (Tangail subdivision of Mymensingh) Hindus contributed an annual britti for the maintenance of a local darga, and zamindars

and communities like that of the Bauls emerged in medieval Bengal, with the dominant Sufi tradition supplying a kind of intellectual sanction for such eclectic admixtures.[12] The poetry of Kanu Fakir of Chittagong (early nineteenth century) with its peculiar mingling of the image of Muhammed with that of Krishna supplies a more recent example.[13] In Bengal, at least, the two-nation theory is a historical absurdity —as was proved once again after 1947 by the magnificent resurgence of Bengali language and culture in East Pakistan against the threat of Urdu domination, culminating in the emergence of Bangladesh. At the same time, it has to be admitted that the premodern synthesis had serious limitations. Social barriers and taboos remained sufficiently formidable for both communities to retain always a sense of separate identity even at the village level. Syncretist tendencies all too often took the form of irrational devotionalism and superstitions shared in common; religious reform movements in the nineteenth century—both Hindu and Muslim—were bound to regard such cults and rites as a debasement of the pristine purity of their respective faiths.

Under British rule, the economic position and status of the Muslim upper class suffered a sudden and sharp decline. British collectors and district magistrates replaced Muslim amils and faujdars, the resumption of 'rent-free' madad-i-maash lands ruined hundreds of old families and dealt a shattering blow to the traditional Islamic educational system, and the change in the official language undermined the Muslim position in the law courts.[14] The Ashrafs of Bengal

placed offerings before the shrine on festive occasions. *Atmacharit*, p. 42.

[12] Muin-ud-din Ahmad Khan, "Research in the Islamic Revivalism of the 19th century and Its Effect on the Muslim Society of Bengal"—Pierre Bessaignet (Ed.), *Social Research in East Pakistan* (Dacca 1960), pp. 39-42.

[13] Kaji Abdul Odud, *Banglar jagoron* (Awakening of Bengal), 1956, p. 129.

[14] W. W. Hunter, *The Indian Musalmans* (1871), pp. 120-22, 137-42.

were the earliest and the worst affected, for they had always been a relatively small community more dependent probably on state patronage than the strongly-entrenched Muslim aristocracy of Upper India. The Muslim ulema who had served as judges in the Islamic courts of law and as teachers in the traditional religious schools were also hard hit by the new developments. Economic distress as well as a conservative distrust of an alien and irreligious system of learning kept such people away from the new schools and colleges, at a time when the Hindu bhadralok castes were eagerly making the switchover from Persian to English education with a confidence buttressed by rising rent-receipts from zamindari or tenure-holding. In a list of Calcutta University graduates from 1858 to 1881, only 38 names—out of a total of 1720—appear undisputably Muslim.[15] The educational lag was reflected in the composition of the administrative services, though here British distrust of the Muslims due to their mutiny and Wahhabi associations probably also played an important part. In April 1871, out of 2111 gazetted posts in Bengal, Europeans held 1338, Hindus 681 and Muslims only 92.[16] In the fourteen districts of East Bengal, stated the chief secretary of the new province in a circular of May 1906, Muslims comprised 65.85 per cent of the total population and 41.13 per cent of the total number of literate people, but they held only 15.5 per cent of government jobs.[17] This disparity in 'middle-class' development constituted one fertile source of communalism. At another level, the permanent settlement and the regulations of 1799 and 1812 consolidated and greatly enhanced the power of the landlord over his tenants—and in many districts of East Bengal, Hindu zamindars faced a peasantry predominantly Muslim.

[15] Dr Pradip Sinha, *op. cit.*, pp. 161-99. It is unfortunate that Dr Sinha has left for his readers the labour of counting and classifying the names on this very valuable list, taken from a tract on education published in 1882.

[16] W. W. Hunter, *op. cit.*, p. 126.

[17] Lyon's Circular No. 5221-3C of 25 May 1906—reprinted in the *Bengalee* of 13 June 1906.

The imbalance between the two communities made the Bengal renaissance almost entirely a movement of the English-educated bhadralok Hindu. The *Sahitya-sadhak-charitmala* collection of biographies of one hundred and two nineteenth and early twentieth century Bengali literary figures includes just one Muslim—Mir Musaraf Hussain. For a short while during its Derozian phase, the movement seemed to be heading for a really radical break with Hindu sectarian traditions and the achievement of a truly secular culture. It is noteworthy that Michael Madhusudan Dutt, the author of an iconoclastic revision of the Ramayana legend, also wrote a magnificent farce on the theme of a Hindu zamindar who boasts of his orthodoxy and condemns the young men of Calcutta for touching food prepared by Muslims—while he himself is planning to seduce a Muslim peasant girl.[18] But as the century progressed, the awakening national pride of the Bengali bhadralok sought sustenance more and more in images of ancient Hindu glory and medieval Hindu resistance to Muslim rule, in stories of Rajput, Sikh and Maratha heroism and the real or imaginary exploits of Pratapaditya, Sitaram or the Sanyasi raiders of Bengal. It has been argued that in much of this patriotic literature, the Muslims were serving merely as convenient whipping-boys; government officials like Bankimchandra could hardly attack the British openly. If true, this explanation only reveals all the more clearly the unconscious but almost universal bhadralok assumption that the sentiments of Muslim contemporaries were not worthy of serious notice, since the English-educated among them (who alone could be—and were usually—treated as social equals) were just a handful while the vast majority were 'ignorant' peasants. Patriotism tended to be identified with Hindu revivalism, 'Hindu' and 'national' came to be used as almost synonymous terms—a good example would be 'National' Nabagopal Mitra with his 'Hindu' mela—

[18] Michael Madhusudan Dutta, *Buro shaliker ghare ro* (1860), Act II, scene I. I am afraid the title is very nearly untranslatable—"The Ways of an Old Rake" is the nearest that I can get to it.

and the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* correspondent who on 19 August 1905 expressed his concern about the fate of "the Bengalis, by which term I mean, throughout this letter, the Hindu portion of it" was merely making explicit a demographically fantastic but still very common assumption.

Recalling his boyhood days at Kishoregunj, Nirad C. Chaudhuri has tried to sum up the pre-1905 bhadralok Hindu attitude towards the Muslims as a compound of "four modes of feeling". "In the first place, we felt a retrospective hostility towards the Muslims for their one-time domination of us, the Hindus; secondly, on the plane of thought we were utterly indifferent to the Muslims as an element in contemporary society; thirdly, we had friendliness for the Muslims of our own economic and social status with whom we came into personal contact; our fourth feeling was mixed concern and contempt for the Muslim peasant, whom we saw in the same light as we saw our low-caste Hindu tenants, or, in other words, as our live-stock."[19] The judgement is harshly-worded but not, perhaps, fundamentally unjust; swadeshi recollections of the lost golden age of alleged Hindu-Muslim amity all too often betray similar assumptions of superiority. Thus, in an editorial note dated 14 December 1905, the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* asserted that relations between the two communities had been ideal in the past: "The Mahomedans trustfully depended on their Hindu fellow-citizens for help and advice in all matters..." But now the partition had come, and it was not merely territorial in its intent—the British wanted to make it "a partition between the Hindus and Mahomedans as well as between landlords and tenants... we are astounded to learn that strenuous efforts are being made to create discord between class and class where before there reigned peace and mutual trust".

But partition and government policy in the new province only brought to the surface tensions already implicit in Bengali life. Long before 1905, forces had been at work in

[19] Nirad C. Chaudhuri, *The Autobiography of An Unknown Indian* (1951), p. 233.

Muslim society which tended to make it more and more resentful of Hindu assumptions of superiority.

The Muslim ulema had reacted to the loss of their old world with a powerful revivalist movement calling for a return to the primitive purity of Islam, to the corruption of which they attributed the political and social disaster which had overtaken their community. At one time commonly called Indian Wahhabism, modern research has shown that this militant revival really owed much more to the ideas of Shah Waliullah of Delhi (1703-62), transmitted through his son Abdul Aziz (1746-1834) to Sayyid Ahmed of Bareilly (1786-1831). For two generations following Abdul Aziz's fatwa in 1803 (which declared India to have become Dar-ul-Harb, leaving to the faithful no other choice except jehad or hijra—religious war or emigration), this Tariqat-i-Muhammadiyah movement fought bitterly and valiantly against the enemies of Islam—first the Sikhs and then the British, till the latter destroyed the Patna propaganda centre and the "rebel camps" on the North-West Frontier in the 1860s. Hunter has left a vivid and often moving account of the support the movement obtained from the downtrodden Muslim masses, stirred by religious frenzy as well as by the egalitarian appeal of Wahhabism.[20] A related, but distinct, movement, more specifically lower class and agrarian in its character, was that of the Faraizis in Bengal, founded by Haji Shariatulla of Faridpur (1781-1820) after his return from Arabia.[21] The combination of rigid orthodoxy with a kind of "religious nationalism" was continued in the Deoband seminary, established in 1867 by the mutiny veteran Maulana Muhammed Qasim; fifty years later, this school produced the revolutionary Ubaidullah Sindhi and greatly contributed to the pan-Islamic Khilafat movement.[22]

[20] W. W. Hunter, *op. cit.*, Chapters I-III. Muin-ud-din Ahmad Khan. *op. cit.*, pp. 34-38. Ziya-ul-Hassan Faruqi, *The Deoband School and the Demand for Pakistan* (1963), Chapter I.

[21] L. S. S. O'Malley, *Faridpur District Gazetteer* (1925), pp. 37-46. Muin-ud-din Ahmad Khan *op. cit.*, pp. 33-34.

[22] S. Abid Hussain, *op.cit.*, pp. 42-44, 74-79. Ziya-ul-Hassan Faruqi, *op. cit.*, Chapter II, III.

The spell of revivalism on the Muslim mind was partly broken in upper India after the 1860s through the efforts of Syed Ahmed Khan (1817-98), who urged his coreligionists to abandon their hostility towards British rule and take to English education as the surest road to jobs and material progress, and who through his Urdu monthly *Tahzibul Akhlaq* (Social Reformer) tried to modernise to some extent Islamic theology and social practices.[23] In Bengal, a similar movement had been started in 1863 with the foundation of the Muhammadan Literary Society by Abdul Latif. Syed Amir Ali offered a liberal reinterpretation of the faith in his *Spirit of Islam*, and together with Syed Amir Hussain organised the Central National Mahomedan Association in Calcutta in 1876, which in its turn inspired the establishment of numerous local anjumans in Bengal district towns.[24] Far from contributing to secular nationalism, however, English education stimulated the Muslim sense of having been left behind in the race for jobs and political influence by the Hindus—and so, paradoxically enough, 'modernist' Aligarh in the end became the seedbed of modern Muslim separatism, while conservative Deoband remained steadfastly opposed to Pakistan. It must be added that the 'modernism' of Syed Ahmed and Amir Ali was far more limited than that of their earlier counterparts among the Hindus. In order to obtain funds from conservative-minded Muslim gentry for the Aligarh College, Syed Ahmed closed down the *Tahzibul Akhlaq*[25] and Mohsin-ul-Mulk, who succeeded him as college secretary, was even more conciliatory in his attitude towards the ulema.[26] In Bengal, the anjumans concentrated on stimulating Muslim solidarity and became strongholds of traditionalist maulvi influence.[27] They became

[23] S. Abid Hussain, *op. cit.*, pp. 23-33. V. V. Gankovsky and L. R. Gordon-Polonskaya, *A History of Pakistan* (1964), pp. 12-16.
[24] G. A. Natesan, *Eminent Mussalmans* (n.d.), p. 148. Kaji Abdul Odud, *Banglar jagoran* (1956), pp. 125-28.
[25] S. Abid Hussain, *op.cit.*, p. 31.
[26] G. A. Natesan, *op. cit.*, p. 79.
[27] Kaji Abdul Odud, *op. cit.*, pp. 128-29.

an important element, in fact, in the process of 'Islamisation' of rural Muslim society which had been started by the revivalists and was being continued by the Ta'aiyuni sect among the Wahhabis—who under Karamat Ali (1800-73) had abandoned the political fight against the British and concentrated all their efforts on the eradication of "non-Islamic superstitions" among the peasantry.[28]

Revivalism and 'reform' alike contributed to the disenchantment of Muslims with the composite Bengali culture which had evolved in premodern times. The Ashraf community—and following their lead, the talukdar or prosperous peasant in search of respectability—tried to model themselves on the Muslim aristocracy of upper India, rejected Bengali for Urdu and Persian, and claimed foreign origin as a status symbol.[29] A modern Bangladesh scholar has drawn attention to the fantastic nature of these claims: Muslims of foreign origin numbered 266,378 in the whole of Bengal (outside Calcutta) according to the 1871 census; thirty years later there were 862,290 such claimants in the single district of Noakhali.[30] Among the Muslim peasantry, the Wahhabis and the Faraizis violently denounced polytheism (Shirk) and sinful innovation (Bid'ah)—and these obviously included participation in Hindu festivals and rites, the adoration of pirs and numerous other syncretist cults and practices so long tolerated or even encouraged by the dominant Sufist tradition. Shah Ismail, Sayyid Ahmed's companion and fellow-martyr, had drawn up a formidable list of such 'un-Islamic' customs in his *Taqwiyat-al-Imam* (c. 1823).[31] Revivalism at times acquired an antizamindar character, as under Titu Mir near Barasat in 1831 and the Faraizi leader Dudu Mian in Faridpur between 1838 and 1847;[32] the

[28] *Imperial Gazetteer, op. cit.*, p. 50. Muin-ud-din Ahmad Khan, *op. cit.*, pp. 36-38.

[29] Dr Pradip Sinha, *op. cit.*, pp. 56-57.

[30] Abdul Majed Khan, *Research about Muslim Aristocracy in East Pakistan*—Pierre Bessaignet (ed.) *op. cit.*, pp. 20-21.

[31] Muin-ud-din Ahmad Khan, *op. cit.*, pp. 33, 44.

[32] Dr S. B. Chaudhuri, *Civil Disturbances during the Bhitish Rule in India 1765-1857* (1955), pp. 95-97, 112-14.

Faraizis were also prominent in the Pabna riots of the early 1870s. As a government official pointed out in 1873, "combination is much more easy among a sect (the Faraizis) whose faith enjoins absolute social equality than among Hindus who are divided into endless varieties of caste, jealous and distrustful of each other".[33] While rebellious peasants sometimes "broke into the houses of Musalman and Hindu landholders with perfect impartiality",[34] agrarian riots could also easily acquire a communal character—Titu Mir's movement for instance was sparked off by a cess imposed on Wahhabis by a Hindu zamindar, and initially took the form of a demonstrative slaughter of cows.[35]

On the all-India level, the proportion of Muslims among Congress delegates had risen to about one-sixth of the total between 1888 and 1892, despite Syed Ahmed's campaigns; but it declined sharply thereafter, as relations worsened in Maharashtra and large areas of upper India as a result of the Ganapati utsava, the anti-cow-slaughter campaign, and the Urdu-Nagari controversy.[36] Thus Hindu revivalism supplied fresh wind to the sails of the separatist movement being promoted from Aligarh. The gorakhshini sabhas

[33] J. G. Charles, offg. joint magistrate, to the collector of Dacca, 19 September 1873—A Report on the Origin, etc., of Agrarian Combinations in Eastern Bengal, Appendix C. Quoted in Dr Pradip Sinha, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

[34] Hunter's description of Titu Mir's movement—*op. cit.*, p. 101.

[35] Dr S. B. Chaudhuri, *op. cit.*, pp. 95-97.

[36] Muslims numbered 219 out of 1248 at the Allahabad Congress (1888), 248 out of 1889 at Bombay (1889), 116 out of 677 at Calcutta (1890), and 91 out of 625 at Allahabad (1892)—the figures for the 1891 Congress are not available. Except at the Lucknow Congress of 1899, held at the chief centre of Hindustani culture (313 Muslims out of 789), all but five of them however coming from the North West Province and Oudh, the number never again passed the one hundred mark. Muslims numbered only 25 out of 1584 at Poona in 1895, and 45 out of 1663 at Calcutta in 1906. Syed Razi Wasti, *Lord Minto and the Indian Nationalist Movement, 1905-1910* (1964), Appendix I, p. 221.

provoked serious riots in the districts of Gaya, Shahabad and Saran in Bihar during the summer of 1893,[37] but in Bengal proper rural life remained undisturbed—agrarian tensions had also died down for a while with the passage of the 1885 Tenancy Act. The Talla riots in North Calcutta in 1897 started with a land dispute involving Maharaja Jotindra-mohan Tagore and some lower-class Muslim tenants; but it apparently developed into a general outburst of the poor of both communities "against the Europeans"—which the secretary of state felt was "the only really ugly feature" about the whole affair.[38]

The Muslim upper class in Bengal, however, had kept almost entirely aloof from the Congress from the earliest days—no doubt largely because their educational backward-ness was more evident here than anywhere else, producing a sense of inferiority and an almighty fear of displeasing the rulers. The one Bengali Muslim to attain any kind of pro-minence in Congress affairs or organisation prior to 1905 seems to have been Abul Kasem of Burdwan.[39] Amir Ali's National Mahomedan Association rejected Surendranath's overture, conveyed through W. S. Blunt, to participate in a united campaign against the watering-down of the Ilbert bill.[40] Some Calcutta Muslim leaders were being attracted —as yet not very strongly—by pan-Islamic ideas: Jamal-al-Din al-Afghani himself had visited the city in the early 1880s.[41] As always, the influence of that great movement

[37] C. E. Buckland, *Bengal under the Lieutenant-Governors* (1902), Volume II, pp. 952-54.
[38] Hamilton to Elgin, 26 August 1897—quoted in A. K. Majumdar, *op. cit.*, p. 345.
[39] Abul Kasem was elected member of the Congress constitution committee in 1904, and also of the standing committee chosen at the 1905 Congress. Annie Besant, *How India Wrought for Freedom* (1915), pp. 413, 440.
[40] W. S. Blunt, *India under Ripon*, pp. 109-12, 121—cited in Dr R. C. Majumdar, *History of the Freedom Movement in Bengal*, Volume I, (1962), pp. 471-72.
[41] Kaji Abdul Odud, *op. cit.*, pp. 126-27.

was complex and contradictory; emphasising Islam's distinctive ethos and extra-Indian loyalities, it also at times urged reforms to adapt the faith to modern conditions—and it is not unlikely that some of the Bengali Muslims who joined the national movement in the 1905 days had been swayed by the bitter anti-West propaganda being carried on by the Calcutta-based Persian weekly *Roznama-i-Mukaddam-Hablul Mateen*, organ of exiled Iranian patriots.[42]

II. The Muslims and the Swadeshi Movement

In course of the last quarter of the nineteenth century, British policy and attitudes towards the Indian Muslims underwent a remarkable sea-change. The image of the dangerous fanatic of mutiny and Wahhabi notoriety was replaced by that of the dependable rough diamond full of martial virtues[43] and preferable by far to the talkative and audacious Bengali babus—"who like to think themselves a nation, and who dream of a future when the English will have been turned out, and a Bengali babu will be installed in Government House, Calcutta..."[44] Officials like Fraser and Risley wanted to transfer parts of East Bengal to Assam not on administrative grounds alone, as publicly announced. The intention also was "to split up and thereby weaken a solid body of opponents to our rule",[45] and Curzon in course of his 1904 tour realised that the aim could be attained even more effectively by a whole new province, which "would invest the Mohammedans in Eastern Bengal with a unity which they have not enjoyed since the days of the

[42] Annual Report on Indian Papers in the Bengal Presidency, Volume IV (1909), p. 163.

[43] That the Bengali Muslim was as unimportant in the Indian army as the Bengali Hindu was of course conveniently forgotten. For a discussion of the development of the prejudice against the Bengali bhadralok, cf. Dr. Amales Tripathi, *The Extremist Challenge* (1967), pp. 86-91.

[44] Curzon to Brodrick, 17 February 1904—Curzon Collections, MSS. Eur. F. 111/163 (Volume VIII).

[45] Note by H. H. Risley, 6 December 1904—Home Public Progs A, February 1905, n. 164.

old Mussulman Viceroys and Kings..."[46] Fuller as the head of the new administration promptly started "playing off the two sections of the population against each other",[47] and Hare carried on the good work, suggesting at one time a 2 : 1 ratio of Muslims to Hindus in new appointments,[48] recruiting Muslims for the police service "as quickly as possible",[49] and repeatedly pressing Minto to sanction a Rs 14 lakh loan to save Nawab Salimulla of Dacca from his creditors as "a political matter of great importance".[50] While educated Muslims were wooed mainly through the offer of jobs and the lure of political influence in the new Muslim majority province, there were instances of grosser kinds of incitement—as when Hindu schoolboys of Kishoregunj were fined Rs 110—for the shouting of Bande Mataram, and the money was ordered to be paid to the local Anjuman-i-Islamia.[51] Government circles also displayed a novel and slightly suspicious solicitude for the Muslim peasants. Minto informed Morley that there was "something of a resemblance in the new province to our Irish difficulties",[52] and Hare felt that "it is hardly realised how terrible is the power of an unscrupulous landlord".[53] Such concern had been conspicuous by its absence throughout much of the nineteenth century.

Government divide-and-rule tactics rudely shattered the

[46] Curzon's speech at Dacca, 18 February 1904—P. Mukerjee, *All About Partition* (1905), p. 39.
[47] Minto to Morley, 15 August 1906—Minto Papers. M1006.
[48] Hare to Minto, 31 October 1906. The viceroy, however, wanted the lieutenant-governor to be a little more discreet (Minto to Hare, 11 November 1906, 13 December 1906), and eventually Hare agreed that "perhaps it may not be wise to be so definite"—Hare to Minto, 16 December 1906. *Ibid*, M979.
[49] Telegram from the lieutenant-governor of Eastern Bengal and Assam to the viceroy, 11 July 1907. *Ibid*, M981.
[50] Hare to Dunlop Smith, 16 February 1907. Hare to Minto, 27 April 1907—*Ibid*, M980.
[51] *Bengalee*, 19 May 1906.
[52] Minto to Morley. 15 August 1906—Minto Papers, M1006.
[53] Hare to Minto, 21 November 1907—*Ibid*, M981.

complacence hitherto evident in nationalist circles in Bengal as regards the communal problem, and a mass movement such as the boycott strove to be obviously demanded far greater contact with the Muslims than had been required by the mendicant elite-politics of the earlier age. Swadeshi propaganda, consequently, took up Hindu-Muslim unity as one of its principal themes, and broadcast it through innumerable speeches, pamphlets and songs.[54] In 1909, an official survey of the Indian press remarked that "ever since the partition of Bengal the influential Hindu papers have tried to win over the Muhammedans to their side", and it particularly referred to the *Sanjibani*'s "endeavour to weld the different nationalities in India, especially the Hindus and the Muhammedans, into one nation".[55] Rabindranath's *Bhandar* ran a discussion forum on the problem.[56] Bepinchandra Pal in *Bangadarshan* pleaded for greater cultural contacts between the two communities, and made the interesting point that the extremist programme of boycott of government jobs would automatically end Hindu-Muslim rivalry if it was ever seriously implemented.[57] Dhirendranath Chaudhuri pointed out in the *Nabyabharat* that the Muslims could no more be regarded today as foreign invaders than the Rajputs or for that matter the Aryans themselves; he even declared that Hindus should be prepared to stop the Shivaji and the Pratapaditya festivals if that was found

[54] Cf. above, Chapter VI.

[55] Annual Report on Indian Papers in the Bengal Presidency, Volume IV (1909). pp. 151, 158.

[56] *Bhandar*, Asar 1312, and again (after the first clashes in Mymensingh) in Asar 1313 (June-July 1905-6). The participants included Maulvi Sirajul Islam, Narendranath Sen, Byomkesh Mustafi, Rasikmohan Chakrabarti, Jogendranath Mukherji, Bipradas Palchaudhuri, Nibaran Dasgupta and Bijoychandra Majumdar. Most of them emphasised the need for greater cultural contacts, and argued that Hindu-Muslim political rivalry was largely an artificial creation of the British, and in any case involved only a tiny minority.

[57] "Bangacchede banger abastha" (Bengal after Partition), *Bangadarshan*, Agrahayan 1312 (November-December 1905). It is significant that neither Pal nor the contributors to the *Bhandar* revealed any awareness of the second—and deeper—source of communal tension

necessary for unity.[58] Communal harmony was sought to be promoted through joint-functions during Id and "National Dinners".[59] Aswinicoomar Banerji suggested a revival of the Satyapir cult, and festivals in honour of Akbar and Mir Kasim were proposed on several occasions.[60] Dramas like Girischandra Ghosh's *Sirajuddoulah* and *Mir Kasim* made "overtures to the Muhammadans with the object of inducing them to make common cause against the powers that be".[61] In sharp contrast to much of nineteenth century literature, Muslim rule was now often described to have been far better than the English[62]—and the *Yugantar* hailed 1857 as "the first war of independence by the Hindus and Musalmans of India".[63]

Yet side by side with all this went on the evocation—on a totally unprecedented scale—of traditional Hinduism with its taboos and rites and philosophy, as morale-booster for the activists and as the primary communication medium be-

in Bengal : the relations between Hindu bhadralok gentry and Muslim peasants.

[58] "Bharater prajaniti" (A Policy for the People in India), *Nabyabharat*, Bhadra 1312 (August-September 1905).

[59] *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 30 November 1905, reported an Id gathering which was addressed by Surendranath, A. C. Banerji and Aswinikumar Dutta. There was another such 'Id reunion' on 26 November 1906, attended by men like Surendranath Banerji, Bhupendranath Bose, Abdul Hamid Ghuznavi and Abdur Rasul—Abstract of Reports from Bengal during second half of November 1906, para 3 (Home Public Progs A, February 1907, n. 152-54). 600 Hindus, Muslims, Brahmos and Christians participated in the 'national dinner' of 14 September 1906 at Albert Hall organised by Ghuznavi and Prithwischandra Ray. The *Sanjibani* hailed such interdining, the *Hitavadi* denounced it. *Bengalee*, 12 September 1906. *Sanjibani*, 20 September 1906. *Hitavadi*, 21 September 1906—RNP (B) for week ending 29 September 1906.

[60] Cf. above, Chapter VI.

[61] Report on the Administration of Bengal, 1906-7, pp. 128-29.

[62] *Hitavarta*, 25 June 1906—RNP (B) for week ending 1 July 1905. *Yugantar*, 10 June 1906—RNP (B) for week ending 16 June 1906.

[63] *Yugantar*, 16 December 1906—RNP (B) for week ending 22 December 1906.

tween the intelligentsia and the masses.[64] The Shivaji utsava, far from being abandoned, was celebrated in June 1906 under extremist auspices in an ostentatiously Hindu manner with the introduction for the first time of the image of Bhawani. The objections of the Anti-Circular Society were brushed aside, and Tilak bluntly declared : "We are all Hindus and idolators and I am not ashamed of the fact... We cannot conceive of Shivaji without Bhawani."[65] How deeply even nationalist-minded Muslims felt about the swadeshi cult of Bankimchandra and things like the Shivaji utsava can be appreciated from the pages of the *Soltan*[66] and the *Mussalman*.[67]

Bepinchandra Pal tried to reconcile these two apparently contradictory aspects of the swadeshi age through his theory of "composite patriotism". In 1903 in a speech at that year's Shivaji utsava, he argued that the "homage to the genius of the great Hindu nation" showed no animus at all towards the Muslims—an Akbar celebration would be equally welcome.[68] He went on to develop his conception of "the future progress of India" as dependent "upon the advance of these particular communities along their own particular lines. The Hindu shall help the realisation of the present national ideal, not by ceasing to be Hindu nor by ignoring his peculiar course of development, but by developing the higher features of his own culture and civilisation.

[64] Cf. above, Chapter VI. pp. 308-13.

[65] *Bengalee*, 6 June 1906.

[66] *Soltan*, 8 June 1906—RNP(B) for week ending 16 June 1906. I have already quoted this extremely temperate and reasonable Muslim criticism of the Shivaji utsava—cf. above, Chapter VI, p. 306.

[67] The *Mussalman* attacked the "anti-Muslim bigotry" of Bankimchandra on 14 December 1906, and criticised on 26 April 1907 the nationalist plans for holding a Bankim anniversary—this time it made an explicit reference to the *Anandamath* passages with their abuse of 'Yavanas'. The latter issue also contained a sharp attack on Shivaji festivals.

[68] This of course missed the real point—the logical counterpart of Shivaji is obviously not Akbar, but Aurangzeb.

So the Mahomedan shall best contribute to the common progress of the nation by developing his own special excellences."[69] Pal in fact visualised a "federal" India, but one in which the units were to be not language-based nationalities, but the religious communities, Hindu, Muslim and Christian (sometimes he mentioned also the aboriginal tribes as another element), each of which "would preserve its distinctive features and by cultivating them contribute to the common national life of India."[70] He used this theory to justify the ultra-Hindu character of the 1906 festival, and explicitly rejected in this context the alternative ideal of a purely secular nationalism—on the ground that an irreligious national life would ultimately lead to immorality and atheism in personal life also.[71] Rabindranath in 1905 seems to have had a somewhat similar conception of national unity, when he wanted his swadeshi samaj to be headed jointly by a Hindu and a Muslim;[72] the poet, however, radically modified his views after the riots of 1906-7. The *Bangabasi* after the Surat split thought the Congress to be a good riddance and, going one step beyond Pal, suggested that the adherents of the different religions should "each form a party of their own", and then cooperate among themselves.[73] A contemporary pamphlet thought that all faiths contain elements of truth, but insisted that the Hindus and the Muslims should stick to their respective beliefs—for the alternative might be loss of faith, which, so the author believed, ruined the

[69] Bepinchandra Pal, *Swadeshi and Swaraj* (1954), pp. 85-87.

[70] Bepinchandra Pal, "Shivaji-Utsava"—*Bangadarshan*, Bhadra 1313 (August-September 1906).

[71] *Ibid.*

[72] *Abastha o byabastha* (The Situation and Our Tasks)—R.R. III, p. 612.

[73] *Bangabasi*, 4 January 1908. The *Sandhya* argued in similar fashion two days later: "That hotchpotch of all castes will not and cannot last. Make the Congress a thing purely for the Hindus or purely for the Muhammedans and it will last; establish it with the auspicious name of religion and it will endure ..." RNP(B) for week ending 11 January 1908.

Roman empire.[74] Such theories could provide a platform on which traditionalist Hindus and Muslims could come together for a while without impairing their orthodoxy—as happened more or less in the immediate postwar years when Gandhi and the Khilafat leaders joined hands in the non-cooperation movement.[75] But the limitations of this approach to Hindu-Muslim unity are evident today. It often involved in practice a virtual abandonment of the task of internal reform and modernisation of orthodox Hinduism and Islam—and yet there was much that was mutually hostile in the traditions of both.[76] And if the 'federal' India of the future was to have the religious communities as its constituents, a basic disagreement between them would open the door for a partition of the country on communal lines. Only one short step thus logically divides Pal's 'composite patriotism' from the two-nation theory.

In view of the formidable barriers to unity set up by tradition, British policy and the attitudes of many Hindu nationalists, what is surprising is not the eventual alienation of the bulk of the Muslims, but the extent of their participation in the swadeshi movement. That this attained quite respectable dimensions is a largely-forgotten fact which deserves emphasis. Prayers against the partition were reported from mosques in Mymensingh in January 1904 and in Barisal and Serampore in August 1905.[77] In the first wave of meetings which followed the announcement of the partition

[74] Aswinikumar Chattopadhyay, *Kajer bai ba bastab unnatir prakrita patha chinta* (Practical Handbook, or Reflections on the True Way to Material Progress), 1907, p. 55.

[75] In a lecture at the Benares University, Mohammad Ali declared that "if Hindus became true Hindus and Muslims true Muslims all the friction would disappear in a moment". G. A. Natesan, *op. cit.*, p. 517. Pal bitterly opposed the Khilafat alliance—but then consistency was hardly his strong point.

[76] One has only to remember the Hindu horror of cow-slaughter—an important traditional element of the Muslim Bakar-Id—and Islam's scorn for idolatry. The Shivaji cult itself would be another good example of mutually-conflicting historical traditions.

[77] *Bengalee*, 10 January 1904, 2 and 8 August 1905.

decision in the July 1905, Muslims—sometimes the local zamindar—figured as presidents at Kishoregunj, Bogra, Madaripur, Banoripara, Khankhanpore and Tangail;[78] eighteen months later a police report was still commenting acidly about "the fashion at Hindu meetings to put up a Mahomedan as their president whether he is qualified or not".[79] There was always a sizable number of Muslims among the regular swadeshi orators, and a practice developed "of sending out agitators in couples consisting of a Hindu and a Muhammadan".[80] While an element of stage-management may be suspected in the seconding of resolutions by Muslim representatives "of the peasant class" at Pabna (23 July 1905),[81] or in the Khulna meeting presided over by the local talukdar where a "very leading part" was allegedly played by "Mahomedans and the cultivating classes",[82] there were also many heart-warming scenes of fraternisation. On 23 September 1905, Hindu and Muslim students of Calcutta marched hand in hand to a 10,000 strong rally at Rajar Bazar, where Rasul declared in ringing terms: "We both Hindus and Mahomedans here belong to the same mother-country—Bengal."[83] Brahmin pandits and Muslims embraced each other,[84] the strains of the 'Bande Mataram' mingled with the 'Allah-ho-Akbar'[85]—and in a Tangail village, in reply to a Muslim who asked "will the Hindoos treat Musalmans as equals", the Hindu speaker replied that those who did not do so would be infidels.[86] On 16 February 1906, the

[78] *Ibid*, 21 and 30 July 1905, 3 and 15 August 1905.
[79] Abstract of Reports from Eastern Bengal and Assam during first half of December 1906—Home Public Progs A, February 1907, n. 265.
[80] Abstract of Reports from Bengal during first half of February 1907—Home Public Progs A, April 1907, n. 207-10.
[81] *Bengalee*, 26 July 1905.
[82] *Ibid*, 8 August 1905.
[83] *Ibid*, 24 September 1905. *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 25 September 1905.
[84] At Manikgunj—*Bengalee*, 11 October 1905, and at Khulna—*Bande Mataram*, 26 May 1907.
[85] This is reported from Hooghly (*Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 29 August 1905), and Muktagacha (*Ibid*, 18 October 1905).
[86] *Bengalee*, 14 September 1905.

Muslims of Calcutta organised a reception at the Albert Hall in honour of the 'sufferers' in the swadeshi cause,[87] and 4000 Muslims are said to have gathered at the College Square on 13 May 1906 to denounce the dispersal of the Barisal provincial conference (which incidentally had had a Muslim—Abdur Rasul—as president for the first time).[88] By the autumn of 1906, the Muslim separatist countercampaign in support of Fuller and the partition had gathered considerable strength, but the *Bengalee* could still list 67 meetings on rakhi-day at which Muslim participation had been noticeable.[89] Meanwhile in Barisal Aswinikumar Dutta was consolidating his hold on the peasantry through famine-relief work on an impressive scale, and the message of swadeshi was being spread through the jari-songs composed by the Muslim folk-poet Mofiuddin Bayati.[90]

Some amount of Muslim participation can in fact be traced in virtually every aspect of the swadeshi movement. Ghuznavi's United Bengal Company, the Bengal Hosiery Company started by Ghuznavi and the Nawab of Bogra, and the Bengal Steam Navigation Company of the Chittagong merchants represented successful examples of Muslim swadeshi entrepreneurship.[91] Abdur Rasul was one of the first among the nationalist leaders to call for a national university as the fittest answer to the Carlyle Circular;[92] six Muslims were included in the 92-member National Council of Education[93] —though the original promise of providing religious education for Muslim boys as well as for Hindus was never

[87] Jogendranath Bandyopadhyay, *Lancchitter samman* (Honour to the Humiliated), 1905, pp. 8-9.
[88] *Bengalee*, 11 and 15 May 1906.
[89] *Ibid*, 24, 25, 26 and 28 October 1906.
[90] Cf. above, Chapter VI.
[91] Cf. above, Chapter III.
[92] Rasul presided over the Field and Academy Club gathering of 24 October 1905—which is the very first meeting to be recorded in Kedarnath Dasgupta's chronological survey of the educational boycott movement. *Shikshar andolan* (1905), Part III.
[93] Haridas and Uma Mukherji, "Swadeshi andolane musalman samproday"—*Swadeshi andolan o banglar navayug* (1961), Chapter VII.

kept.[94] Abul Husain and Liakat Husain were extremely prominent as agitators during the days of the great East Indian Railway strike in 1906, and the Muslim drivers on the Eastern Bengal State Railway took pledges on the Koran when they in their turn walked out in December 1907.[95] Muslims were active members of the Brahmo-led Anti-Circular Society—though not, it seems, of most of the other samitis.[96] The early revolutionaries tended to be somewhat aggressively Hindu and extremely suspicious of Muslims—yet even here Bhupendranath Dutta names Mujibur Rahaman as connected with the Calcutta Anushilan at one stage, and Abul Kalam Azad has left a tantalisingly brief account of his contacts with Aurobindo's circle established through Shyamsundar Chakraborty.[97]

The swadeshi Muslims included a few zamindars and big wigs who—like many of their Hindu counterparts—confined their activities to signing petitions, lending their names to rakhi-bandhan, national fund, or similar appeals, and occasionally presiding over meetings. Among men of this type may be mentioned Nawab Abdur Sobhan Chaudhuri of Bogra;[98] Salimulla's brother Khwaja Atikulla, who moved the antipartition resolution at the Calcutta Congress;[99] and

[94] *Bengalee*, 13 March 1906.
[95] Cf. above, Chapter V, p. 226.
[96] Cf. above, Chapter VII, p. 366.
[97] Dr Bhupendranath Dutta, *Bharater dwitiya swadhinata sangram* (1949), p. 104. Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, *India Wins Freedom* (1959), pp. 4-5.
[98] The Nawab of Bogra signed a joint telegram of Rajshahi division zamindars to the secretary of state protesting against the partition (*Bengalee*, 25 July 1905), and his name figured in a national fund appeal in December 1905 (*Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 20 December 1905). He was also one of the original directors of the Bangalakshmi Cotton Mills (*Bengalee*, 6 March 1906).
[99] *Bengalee*, 29 December 1906. Atikulla had quarrelled with his brother over the family estates, and apparently had been won for the swadeshi cause after a meeting with Motilal Ghosh on 21 September 1906—Abstract of Reports from Eastern Bengal and Assam during second half of September 1906, Home Public Progs A, December 1906, n. 144-48.

Khan Bahadur Mohammed Yusuf, president of the Central National Mahomedan Association, who presided over the swadeshi rally at the Federation Hall site on 16 October 1906.[100] Chaudhuri Ghulam Ali Moula of Barisal signed the rakhi-appeals of 1906 and 1907;[101] Syed Motahar Husain—another zamindar of the same district—presided over the first anniversary celebration of the Swadesh Bandhab Samiti in August 1906;[102] and Chaudhuri Alimuzzaman of Faridpur in February 1907 headed an antipartition memorial signed by "about a thousand other Mahomedan zamindars, taluqdars, jotedars, traders and others" of his district.[103] But the bulk of the Muslim upper class remained either politically indifferent or hostile, and no one on the swadeshi side could really match in social stature or influence men like Nawab Salimulla of Dacca, Nawab Ali Chaudhuri of Mymensingh and Amir Husain of Calcutta. Mohammed Yusuf, a "weak old man" according to official reports, had to pay dearly for his swadeshi sympathies—his coreligionists ousted him from the Central National Mahomedan Association.[104]

Abul Kasem of Burdwan, who had already served on Congress committees, Abdul Halim Ghuznavi, petty zamindar of Tangail and Calcutta lawyer, and Abdur Rasul the Anglicised barrister[105] represented a second type of swadeshi Muslim, all but indistinguishable in social position and outlook from the usual middle-class Hindu Congress leader. Abul Kasem. despite—or perhaps because of — his established Congress connections, seems to have been less active than the others, though he did address occasional meetings in Calcutta, 24-

[100] *Bengalee*, 18 October 1906.
[101] *Ibid*, 9 October 1906. *Bande Mataram*, 8 October 1907.
[102] Samitis in the Bakargunj District, Supplementary Report, p. 29. Home Political Deposit, July 1909, n. 13.
[103] *Mussalman*, 8 February 1907.
[104] Fortnightly Report from the Government of Bengal, 26 October 1906—Home Public Progs A, December 1906, n. 147. Abstract of Reports from Bengal during first half of December 1906—Home Public Progs A, February 1907, n. 265.
[105] He generally spoke in English, and had an English wife.

Parganas and his home district of Burdwan[106] and went on attending provincial conferences even in the ebb-tide of the movement.[107] He had been made secretary of the Bengal Mohammedan Association (the swadeshi Muslim's counter-blast to the Muslim League) during its first year, but chose to absent himself from Calcutta for the major part of his term and thus rendered the organisation largely ineffective.[108] Ghuznavi and Rasul were extremely prominent as swadeshi agitators from the early days of the boycott movement. The *Bengalee* named them as the two leading swadeshi Muslims on 1 October 1905, six years later theirs were the two Muslim names to adorn a rakhi-bandhan appeal—the last before the abrogation of the partition.[109] A Calcutta police report dated 21 September 1905 described Ghuznavi as "the principal agent, sent round to the Mahomedan shopkeepers" to win them for the boycott; "he specially worked upon the English-made boot-importers in Chandni Chowk, who are a large community of Eastern Bengal men all of Mymensingh".[110] Ghuznavi became treasurer of the Bengal Mohammedan Association.[111] Abdur Rasul, described in another early police report as "the leading spirit of the small Muham-

[106] At Naren Sen's Square in Calcutta on 21 November 1905 (*Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 23 November 1905), at the College Square meeting of 13 May 1906 (*Bengalee*, 15 May 1906), at a reception to Tilak (*Ibid*, 8 June 1906), at a big, Muslim rally at Basirhat (*Ibid*, 1 July 1906), at a sympathy meeting for the imprisoned Liakat Husain (*Ibid*, 4 April 1908), and at Memari in Burdwan district (*Ibid*, 3 May 1908).

[107] Abul Kasem attended the Faridpur provincial conference in September 1911—Home Political Progs B, October 1911, n. 112-13.

[108] As Mujibur Rahaman, the joint secretary of the association, complained at its first annual meeting on 15 December 1907. Abul Kasem was dropped from the list of office-bearers for the second year. *Mussalman*, 20 December 1907.

[109] *Rakhi-bandhan Appeal* for 30 Aswin 1318 (17 October 1911), printed at the Samya Press—Private Papers of Krishnakumar Mitra.

[110] Halliday to Carlyle, 21 September 1905—Home Public Progs B, October 1905, n. 115.

[111] *Mussalman*, 7 December 1906, 20 December 1907.

medan party which has joined the agitation",[112] hailed from Comilla; his house at 14 Royd Street was the chief meeting place of the Bengal Mohammedan Association, of which he was first president and then secretary.[113] At the Calcutta Congress he was one of the very small group of Muslims who, somewhat hesitatingly, inclined towards the extremists,[114] and his call at the Berhampore provincial conference for a boycott of honorary posts earned him the warm praise of Brahmabandhab Upadhyay's *Sandhya* and *Swaraj*.[115]

The other swadeshi Muslim leaders were men of humbler origin; invariably described in official sources as paid agents of the Hindus, denounced by the separatist *Mihir-o-Sudhakar* as "all in receipt of pay, hired speakers; all sham",[116] they yet remained an almost ubiquitous feature of nationalist meetings throughout our period. Din Muhammed was a recent convert from Hinduism (his original name was Monoranjan Ganguli) who was connected, like many nationalist-minded Muslims, with the Anti-Circular Society. His visit to Jessore in August 1906 infused new life into the movement in that district, and an official report makes the very unusual admission that at meetings addressed by him, "Muhammedans not only took part but actually preponderated."[117] We hear about him addressing meeting at Ranaghat, Gobardanga and Dinajpur.[118] Dedar Bux, a

[112] Report on the Agitation against the Partition of Bengal (25 January 1906), para 51. Home Public Progs A, June 1906, n. 175.
[113] *Mussalman*, 7 December 1906, 20 December 1907.
[114] Diary of G. S. Khaparde, 31 December 1907.
[115] *Sandhya*, 1 April 1907—RNP(B) for week ending 6 April 1907. *Swaraj*, 24 Chaitra 1313.
[116] *Mihir-o-Sudhakar*, 21 June 1907—RNP(B) for week ending 29 June 1907.
[117] Report on the Antipartition and Swadeshi Movement in Bengal (7 September 1906), para 12—Home Public Progs B, October 1906, n. 13. The Anti-Circular Society elected Din Muhammed as a delegate to the Barisal and Berhampore provincial conferences—*Bengalee*, 13 April 1906, 20 March 1907.
[118] Abstract of Reports from Bengal during first half of February 1907—Home Public Progs A, April 1907, n. 207-10. *Bengalee*, 4 November 1906; *Bande Mataram*, 18 June 1907.

Calcutta teacher, had addressed a letter to the *Bengalee* on 15 September 1905 calling for unity between Hindus and Muslims, which he said would bring about a combination of intelligence with strength. He soon became a regular swadeshi orator, addressing numerous meetings in Calcutta, visiting Tamluk, Bagnan, Rajshahi and Malda in the early months of 1907,[119] and often accompanying Surendranath to conferences in the districts.[120] Closely associated with the moderates, Dedar Bux was appointed a "preacher" by the Hooghly-Howrah district association dominated by them in March 1908.[121] Next year he moved the boycott resolution at the Hooghly provincial conference,[122] and he seems to have acted also as a kind of agent for Aswinicoomar Banerji in Calcutta Corporation politics.[123] Hedayet Bux, a teacher from Dacca, and Moulavi Monirazzaman, who belonged to the editorial staff of the pronationalist Muslim weekly *Soltan*, figured in a list of swadeshi orators against whom the government of East Bengal and Assam wanted to take action

[119] Home Public Progs A, February 1907, n. 265; April 1907, n. 207-10; June 1907, n. 227-29.

[120] Dedar Bux accompanied Surendranath to Kushtia and Sirajgunj in February 1907, to the Rajshahi and Mymensingh conferences the following April, and to the stormy Midnapur district conference in December 1907. *Bengalee*, 24 February and 1 May 1907; *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 12 December 1907.

[121] Along with 3 Hindus—the association promising to bear their travel expenses. *Bengalee*, 3 April 1908.

[122] Government of Bengal to Government of India (Home), No. 1889 PD of 20 September 1909—Home Political Progs B, November 1909, n. 104.

[123] Dedar Bux to A. C. Banerji, 5 and 6 August 1908. Another letter, dated 6 July 1908, is rather unpleasantly fulsome in its praise of the Hindus: "I am exceedingly thankful to receive your favour of date. It is gratifying to think that though a poor man I am not forgotten by our great swadeshi leaders. May Heaven prolong their lives for our country's good. Had the community I belong to have been able to realise the fact that our elder brethren the Hindus are solely actuated by sincere and disinterested motives to give them a lift, the happy and much desired union between the two communities would have speedily been formed. But alas! this backwardness in

in May 1907.[124] Syed Abu Muhammad Ismail Hussain Siraji of Serajgunj, described in the official record with more venom than good taste as "the grandson of a constable of police who married a prostitute",[125] was actually a distinguished swadeshi poet[126] who was beaten up by his propartition coreligionists in October 1906[127] but went on writing patriotic verses, addressing meetings and even attending volunteer rallies.[128] And in sheer energy and zeal there were few Hindu orators who could match Abul Husain of Hooghly and Abdul Gafur, the exteacher of Persian of Batajor (the home-village of Aswinikumar Dutta).[129] We hear of them addressing meetings in Nadia, Dinajpur, Pabna, Tippera, Dacca, Bakargunj, Noakhali, Chittagong, Burdwan, Mymensingh, Diamond Harbour—in fact, in virtually all parts of Bengal, exhorting Jamalpur and Asansol strikers and Barisal peasants alike to rally to the swadeshi cause.[130] Gafur in particular caused alarm in official circles by his militant spee-

consequence of the want of education has made them blind to their own interests." Private Papers of A. C. Banerji.

[124] *Mihir-o-Sudhakar*, 21 June 1907—*op. cit. Bengalee*, 18 May 1906. Government of E. Bengal and Assam to Government of India (Home), No. 14C of 14 May 1907—Home Public Progs A, June 1907, n. 117.

[125] Fortnightly Report from Eastern Bengal and Assam No. 184T, 7 December 1906, para 4—Home Public Progs A, January 1907, n. 262.

[126] Soumendra Gangopadhyay, *Swadeshi andolan o bangla sahitya* (1906). p. 253.

[127] *Bengalee*, 21 October 1906. The official record predictably dismissed the incident as "insignificant". Fortnightly Report from Eastern Bengal and Assam, No. 228 M, 5 November 1906—Home Public Progs, December 1906, n. 148.

[128] Thus Siraji attended an athletic display by volunteers at Patipukur (North Calcutta)—*Swaraj*, 10 Chaitra 1313 (March 1907).

[129] Deposition of S. Muhammad Husain, exspecial subregistrar of Barisal, before R. Hughes-Buller, 12 June 1907—Home Political Progs A. February 1908, n. 42.

[130] Home Public Deposit, September 1906, n. 5; Progs B, October 1906, n. 13; Progs A, December 1906, n. 144-48, n. 310-11; February 1907, n. 265; April 1907, n. 207-10; May 1907, n. 155-56. *Bengalee*, 7 July 1906, 30-31 August and 5 September 1906, 1 and 3 May 1908.

ches, referring to the British ill-treatment of the sultan of Turkey and urging his audiences "to learn lathi-play as they would not be allowed to use guns"; he even reportedly spoke of driving "those uneducated foreigners back to the other side of the seas".[131]

But the agitator who towered above them all was the elderly Muslim from Patna, Liakat Husain—"a lion amongst men", the *Sandhya* once described him to be.[132] Already fairly well-known for his charitable work—in May 1901 he had started a 'Society for the support of widows and the helpless in India' with some support from Syed Amir Hussain and Bilgrami—Liakat Husain on 4 August 1905 wrote a letter to Surendranath conveying his "best sympathies on the severe calamity" of partition, and suggesting a boycott as the only means of "repairing the heavy loss sustained thereby".[133] In the coming months Liakat Husain became an extremely active member of the Anti-Circular Society, functioning as the leader of a procession party which raised funds through street-singing every evening, and trying to organise a 'Swadeshi Volunteer Corps' for physical training.[134] He also helped to raise "large sums of money" for the famine-relief work being conducted under Aswinikumar Dutta and Ambicacharan Majumdar in Barisal and Faridpur.[135] In the summer of 1906 the official record describes him as very active in the East Indian Railway strike—"he addressed several meetings of strikers at Asansol and Jharia and organised a vol-

[131] Fortnightly Report from Eastern Bengal and Assam, No. 511T, 14 April 1907 (Gafur's speeches at Dinajpur and Chittagong)—Home Public Progs A, May 1907, n. 155.

[132] *Sandhya*, 28 September 1907—RNP(B) for week ending 5 October 1907.

[133] "Facts about Liakat Husain Gleaned from His Papers", pp. 15-16—enclosed with Telegram No. 1728, 15 July 1907, from the viceroy to the secretary of state—Home Political Progs A, February 1908, n. 43. The early date of Liakat Husain's letter to Surendranath is interesting—the boycott slogan was publicly adopted by the leaders only on 7 August 1905.

[134] *Bengalee*, 16 and 19 June, 8 November 1906.

[135] "Facts about Liakat Husain...", *op. cit.*, p. 19.

unteer corps at the former place."[136] After the winter of 1906-7, Liakat Husain broke sharply with the moderates[137]—he was now to be found addressing meetings jointly with Pal and Brahmabandhab Upadhyay,[138] and put up for a time at the *Sandhya* offices.[139] He rushed to Mymensingh after the riots there in the summer of 1907, and the police later on found the draft of a pamphlet in his handwriting denouncing the Muslims who were "assaulting the Hindus for nothing and committing outrages on the Hindu women" as "kafirs" who "according to the Hadis and Kuran... doomed to suffer the pangs of hell".[140] What alarmed the government most of all was Liakat Husain's Urdu pamphlet, published on 3 June 1907, which tried to rouse Muslim religious sentiment against the British in a manner which must have recalled in the minds of the latter the days of the Wahhabi agitation.[141] When Liakat Husain and Gafur came to Barisal a few days later apparently with the intention of dis-

[136] *Ibid*, p. 17.

[137] *Ibid*. The Anti-Circular Society delegates to the Berhampore provincial conference (March 1907) included six Muslims—Abul Husain, Din Muhammad, Dedar Bux, Ebrahim Husain, Abdul Majid and Abdul Gafur—but not Liakat Husain. *Bengalee*, 20 March 1907.

[138] Home Public Progs A, February 1907, n. 152-54. *Bande Mataram*, 1 July 1907.

[139] *Sandhya*, 28 September 1907—*op. cit.*

[140] "Facts about Liakat Husain...", *op. cit.*, p. 18. The Hindus who could rise above their loyalties to an equivalent degree numbered precious few in 1907—or later on.

[141] *Musalman dunya ka waste mustad aur kafir mat ho*—(Musalmans don't go astray and don't turn infidels for the sake of the world). In form this was a refutation of an article published in the Bombay daily *Sultan-ul-Akbar* which had tried to show that loyalty to the existing government was a Koranic duty. Liakat replied that "it would be erroneous...to obey an order of the ruler of the time which is antagonistic to God and the Prophet", and quoted the following verse from the *Sura-e-Maida*: "Oh believers in God, don't make the Jews and the Christians your friends." Translation of Liakat Husain's pamphlet, contained in No. 167C, 19 June 1907, from officiating chief secretary, government of Eastern Bengal and Assam to government of India (Home)—Home Political Progs A, February 1908, n. 42.

tributing this pamphlet, they were promptly arrested, tried for sedition and given heavy jail sentences (3 years' RI for Liakat). The former was also prosecuted in the autumn of 1907 in Calcutta for delivering allegedly incendiary speeches.[142]

The oft-repeated charge that the swadeshi Muslim agitators were all paid agents perhaps requires a little discussion. The official sources betray a pretty evident bias,[143] and men like Ghuznavi and Rasul were obviously as well-off as most Hindu leaders—but in the case of some of the others there are bits of independent evidence as to the existence of some kind of cash connection. During the EIR strike, Surendranath sent the following note to A. C. Banerji on 31 August 1906: "Abul Husain will go up to Asansol. Kindly send his fare per bearer (Rs 10)."[144] The *Nabasakti* while praising Liakat Husain mentioned in passing the fact that at one time the moderates had paid him a "small allowance. . .out of the National Fund".[145] But travel allowances and payments for whole-time work are after all hardly uncommon in modern politics, and these are seldom regarded as evidence that the men receiving them are mere mercenaries. There were paid Hindu swadeshi preachers too, as for example in Barisal.[146] If this was not yet a very common feature, that indicates not necessarily greater sincerity, but perhaps only the still largely upper-class character of swadeshi Hindu

142 Home Political Progs A, August 1908, n. 24.

143 Swadeshi Muslims are invariably dismissed as people of low birth and men "without any position or status in their own community". (Fortnightly Report from E. Bengal and Assam, No. 184T, 7 December 1906—Home Public Progs A, January 1907, n. 262.) As the most usual charge against the Congress from the days of Dufferin had been that it consisted of a "microscopic minority" of upper-class babus without contact with the masses, there is obviously here an instance of heads-I-win-tails-you-lose.

144 Private Papers of Aswinicoomar Banerji.

145 *Nabasakti*, 8 November 1907—RNP(B) for week ending 15 November 1907.

146 Cf. above, Chapter VII, p. 382.

politics. The British, so contemptuous in their descriptions of these Muslims, showed in their actions a very acute awareness of the latter's importance—apart from the hounding down of Liakat Husain, there is the little-known fact that six swadeshi Muslims (Abul Husain, Abdul Gafur, Din Muhammad, Ismail Husain Siraji, Hedayet Bux, Moniruzzaman) shared with Bepinchandra Pal the honour of figuring in the first list of proposed prosecutions for sedition drawn up by the government of Eastern Bengal and Assam.[147] The conduct of Liakat Husain, who broke with the moderates only to join the extremists, and unflinchingly underwent three years' rigorous imprisonment, is hardly that of a mercenary; and could a mere paid agent have composed the stirring patriotic verse of Ismail Husain Siraji?[148]

A glimpse into the minds of the Muslims who supported the swadeshi movement—with or without qualification—is provided by two weeklies, the English-language *Mussalman* and the Bengali *Soltan*. The *Mussalman*, owned by a limited company headed by Rasul and Ghuznavi,[149] was started on 7 December 1906 with Abul Kasem as its nominal editor—but the work of actually conducting it seems to have fallen mainly on the shoulders of Mujibur Rahaman. A part-proprietor of the *Bengalee* is said to have advanced a loan

[147] Government of Eastern Bengal and Assam to Government of India (Home), No. 14C, 14 May 1907—Home Public Progs A, June 1907, n. 117.

[148] I quote a sample from *Akangkha* (Heart's Desire), published in the *Swaraj* of 3 Chaitra 1313 (March 1907):

—Ami chahina sabhyata, (bhandamir katha)
Chahina sundara besh,
Ami chahi shudhu ei adhikar,
Bharat amar desh /
Ami chahina darshan chahina kabya
Chahi shudhu ami ei
Bharatbarsha bharatbashir
Para adhikar nei /

[149] List of English and foreign newspapers published in Bengal, revised up to 31 December 1907. (G. C. Denham, special branch, 13 March 1908)— Annual Report on Indian Papers, Volume IV, pp. 121-26.

of Rs 3500 to help start the paper.[150] While the *Mussalman* often broadly supported Surendranath's political line—thus it was critical of the *Bande Mataram* and blamed Tilak for the Surat split[151]—it did not hesitate to take up an independent stand, despite its alleged financial dependence, on issues involving what it considered to be the legitimate interests and sentiments of the Muslims. The *Mussalman* supported swadeshi and boycott—which, it argued, would benefit above all the weavers among whom Muslim 'jolhas' outnumbered Hindu 'tantis'[152] but was much more cautious on the partition issue,[153] no doubt because it realised that most of its educated coreligionists were still greatly in love with the idea of a Muslim-majority province. On the council reforms issue, the *Mussalman* at one time came to differ quite sharply from the Hindu nationalists.[154] Mujibur Rahaman, however, personally denounced the Muslim craving for government jobs,[155] and the *Mussalman* repeatedly condemned those educated Muslims who were ashamed of their Bengali origin and culture and tried to promote the Urdu medium. "Bengalee is the mother-tongue and vernacular of the Bengalees—be they Hindus or Mohamedans", it unequivocally declared in an editorial on 21 December 1906.[156] But what worried and embarrassed most the men conducting the *Mussalman*—like

[150] Fortnightly Report from Government of Eastern Bengal and Assam, No. 291T, 12 January 1907, para 7—Home Public Progs A, February 1907, n. 153.

[151] *Mussalman*, 14 December 1906, 3 May 1907, 17 January 1908.

[152] *Ibid*, 26 April 1907. This by the way was a very common swadeshi Muslim argument—Rasul used it at the Barisal provincial conference. Priyanath Guha, *Yojna-bhanga* (1907), p. 39.

[153] "There may be two opinions on the advisability of Bengal partition, but a Bengali who opposes swadeshism or use of country-made clothes must not brag of patriotism." *Mussalman*, 26 April 1907.

[154] Annual Report on Indian Papers in the Bengal Presidency (1909) —Annual Report on Indian Papers, Volume IV, p. 156.

[155] *Bengalee*, 14 November 1906.

[156] Another editorial, dated 13 March 1908, proudly announced that "We Bengali Mussalmans are not ashamed to say that our vernacular is Bengali."

other nationalist-minded Muslims—were the numerous instances of Hindu assumptions of superiority, all the more irritating for being largely unconscious, which still vitiated so much of Bengal's social life. Mujibur Rahaman, in a very fine article written for the *Hindustan Review* and reprinted in the *Mussalman* of 13 November 1908,[157] drew up a formidable catalogue of such grievances even while reiterating the need for unity and denouncing those "educated Muhammadans in India who consider themselves as foreigners". Hindus ostentatiously throw away the water in their 'hookkas" (hubble-bubble) when they meet a Muslim; the sacrifice of cows horrifies them and their zamindars often deal harshly with Muslim peasants observing Bakr-Id—yet aerated water and sugar prepared by Muslims are accepted without the least objection, and no one objects to the daily slaughter of "thousands of the bovine animals...by professional butchers in almost all the towns in the country". Hindus do not always accept even educated Muslims as their social equals, and their literature is full of abuse of the Yavanas. To the plea that the latter term means no more than a non-Hindu, Mujibur Rahaman replies unanswerably that the word 'native' is also in strict etymology quite unobjectionable. All these things, he concludes, are no doubt "small matters"—but "It is the agglomeration of small matter, that constitutes a gigantic thing." Essays like these help to explain why so many Muslim politicians—from Syed Ahmed to Jinnah—after starting as good nationalists have ended as apologists and advocates of communalism.

The *Soltan* stood for a rather different and more qualified kind of support for nationalism. Emphasising quite as much as any communalist the special position and claims of the Muslims, often sharply critical of certain aspects of Hindu behaviour,[158] it at the same time totally rejected the pro-

[157] "Indian Unity : As Evidenced by Hindu-Mussalman Relations in Bengal".

[158] Thus it deplored the use by Hindus of terms like 'Yavana' and 'Nere' (24 June 1904), was critical of festivals in honour of Shivaji or Sitaram (7 October 1904, 10 February 1905, 8 June 1906), and

British political line being put forward from Aligarh and Dacca. The *Soltan* urged its readers to follow the Hindu example of selfreliance in economic life and education: "Nothing but selfhelp and selfdependence can make a people really great... We should on no account cast aside indigenous arts and industries. Neither the Hindus nor the English will be able to effect our improvement... Stand on your own legs and strive after higher education."[159] It was a warm supporter of swadeshi and boycott, though in part, it seems, because it felt that otherwise the Hindus would steal a march over the Muslims;[160] and it also advised participation in the Congress.[161] The *Soltan* was notable too for its militant pan-Islamism; it published articles on the age-old conflict between Islam and Christianity, printed poems (including some by Ismail Husain Siraji) calling for a revivalist campaign against the West, and hailed the nationalist movements of Persia, Egypt and Turkey.[162] It thus represents a kind of a link be-

repeatedly denounced Hindu zamindari oppression of Muslim tenants on the cow-slaughter or other issues (23 March 1906, 4 January 1907, 22 March 1907, 3 May 1907, 9 August 1907). RNP(B) for weeks ending 2 July 1904; 15 October 1904; 18 February 1905; 16 June 1906; 31 March 1906; 12 January 1907; 6 April 1907; 11 May 1907; 17 August 1907.

[159] *Soltan*, 13 September 1907—RNP(B) for week ending 21 September 1907.

[160] "If the Musalmans give up swadeshi in a spirit of antagonism to the Hindus or for fear of incurring the displeasure of the English, all the arts and industries of India will be monopolised by the Hindus, and the Musalman community, which is sufficiently poor even now, will become poorer still." *Soltan*, 3 January 1908—RNP(B) for week ending 11 January 1908. The passage occurred in a polemic with *Mihir-o-Sudhakar* and it is just possible that the *Soltan* was deliberately emphasising this selfish reason so as to influence the supporters of that blatantly communal weekly.

[116] *Soltan*, 21 December 1906, 24 January 1908—RNP(B) for weeks ending 29 December 1906, 1 February 1908. It argued that Muslims by participating in the Congress would be able to block the passage of resolutions detrimental to their interests, and also to focus attention on issues like the treatment of Muslims in South Africa.

[162] *Soltan*, 15 June 1906, 9 November 1906, 12 April 1907, 19 July 1907, 22 November 1907—RNP(B) for weeks ending 23 June 1906;

tween the swadeshi Muslims and the Khilafat movement of the succeeding decade.

The nationalist-minded Muslims seem to have worked mainly as individuals, and the one or two attempts they made to give a stable organisational form to their activities were not particularly impressive. Liakat Husain's proposed Anjuman-i-Islamia which the *Bengalee* welcomed on 4 April 1906 was apparently stillborn. The Bengal Mahomedan Association was set up in Calcutta on 3 November 1906 with the purpose of rallying "educated Mussulmans scattered over the province" behind a programme which emphasised "that the true interest of the Muhammedans lies in the growth of friendly relations between the different sections of the Indian community".[163] A year later the association's joint secretary Mujibur Rahaman admitted that a peace appeal before Bakr-Id had been virtually the sole contribution so far of the organisation to public life, and the annual meeting dispersed after electing office-bearers and delegates to the Congress and passing vaguely-worded resolutions on communal amity and on "steps" (left undefined) to stop "dramas and plays containing things offensive to the Musalmans".[164] The Indian Musalman Association set up on 31 December 1906 at a meeting in Rasul's house was probably even more of a paper organisation, though its office-bearers included a number of men already well-known or destined to fame—Nawab Syed Mahomed of Madras as president, Syed Hyder Reza of Delhi as one of the secretaries (the other being Rasul), and as vice-president, Muhammed Ali Jinnah.[165]

17 November 1906; 20 April 1907; 27 July 1907; 30 November 1907. An official report noted that the *Soltan* "has made mischievous appeals to the pan-Islamic and anti-Christian spirit, and bids for sympathy with the extreme nationalist party in Egypt and Persia". Fortnightly Report from the Government of Eastern Bengal and Assam, No. 231C, 8-9 July 1907—Home Political Progs A, August 1907, n. 4.

[163] Abstract of Reports from Bengal during first half of November 1906—Home Public Progs A, January 1907, n. 262-63.

[164] *Mussalman*, 20 December 1907.

[165] *Ibid*, 11 January 1907.

This organisational weakness was of course no more than an index to the limited appeal of swadeshi ideas on the Muslims of Bengal. A contemporary diarist noted that "Educated Mahomedans, who are almost all in Government service, hope for the continuance of the partition, for it has become the declared policy of the East Bengal Government to prefer Mahomedans to Hindus in Government service..."[166] Separatist ideas and ambition filtered down through the local Anjumans dominated by orthodox mullas, and merged with the strong currents of anti-Hindu revivalism already at work in Bengali Muslim rural society. As Fraser told Minto, "Ignorant and uneducated Mahomedans follow their leaders more readily than Hindus", provided these leaders "cooperate with the Imams and leaders in the mosques".[167] The peasant, as a rule, whether Hindu or Muslim, remained politically inert, but in certain areas he was stirred into action against the Hindu bhadralok gentry, and riots took place—communal in form, very largely agrarian in content.

Muslim communalism was thus developing on two levels. Attention has generally been focused on the activities of the Muslim elite—the Simla deputation of 1 October 1906, the foundation of the Muslim League three months later at Dacca, the achievement of separate electorates in 1908-9.[168] The corresponding developments at the provincial level in Bengal are also tolerably well-known. The scheme for a new Muslim-majority province got the enthusiastic support of Nawab Salimulla of Dacca and the *Mihir-o-Sudhakar* owned by Nawab Ali Chaudhuri from the very beginning.[169] The

[166] Unpublished Diary of Gyanchandra Banerji, 17 October 1906.

[167] Fraser to Minto, 28 March 1907—Minto Papers, M980.

[168] For four recent accounts of these developments, all based mainly on the private papers of officials, see S. R. Wasti, *Lord Minto and the Indian Nationalist Movement* (1964), Chapters II, V; M. D. Das, *India under Morley and Minto* (1964), Chapters V, VI; Amales Tripathi, *The Extremist Challenge* (1967), Chapter V; and S. A. Wolpert, *Morley and India 1906-1910* (1967).

[169] The *Amrita Bazar Patrika* of 15 February 1904 reported that a

standing committee elected by the Town Hall meeting of 7 August 1905 included not a single Muslim among its 23 Dacca representatives,[170] and even at the height of that first swadeshi upsurge propartition Muslim meetings were being held—at Faridpur on 31 July, and at Calcutta organised by the Anjuman-i-Khadam-ul-Islam on 10 August.[171] The inaugural meeting at Dacca on 16 October 1905 of the Mohammadan Provincial Association—with a subscription of Re I a month and membership restricted to men "of social position and dignity"[172] was apparently not much of a success.[173] But in the following months local anjumans, old or newly established, busied themselves arranging receptions for Fuller, and then organising meetings and sending telegrams condemning his removal—a campaign which, Minto informed Morley, "as long as it does not get out of control...will, I hope, be very useful to us".[174] Two sets of meetings were held in many East Bengal towns on the first anniversary of the partition—the division often being "strictly on religious lines".[175]

By itself, this movement of Muslim aristocrats (plus a few lawyers and journalists)[176] would probably not have become

meeting in Dacca on 9 February arranged by Salimulla and attended by 95 persons (mostly his relatives or dependants) had demanded an enlarged scheme for a new province; nine days later, Curzon in his Dacca speech dropped the first public hint that the government was thinking on similar lines. The *Mihir-o-Sudhakar* welcomed the scheme on 5 February 1904—RNP(B) for week ending 13 February 1904.

[170] *Bengalee*, 8 August 1905. There were altogether 24 Muslims in the 226-member standing committee.

[171] *Mihir-o-Sudhakar*, 11 August 1905, 18 August 1905—RNP for weeks ending 10 and 26 August 1905.

[172] *Ibid*, 27 October 1905—RNP(B) for week ending 4 November 1905.

[173] *Bengalee*, 22 October 1905.

[174] Minto to Morley, 22 August 1906—Minto Papers, M1006.

[175] Abstract of Reports from Eastern Bengal and Assam during first half of October 1906—Home Public Progs A, December 1906, n. 310-11.

[176] The Bengal members of the first provincial committee of the Muslim League included, apart from Salimulla, Nawab Ali Chaudhuri and Amir Husain, the barrister Abdur Rahim, two vakils—Shamsul Huda

particularly formidable in Bengal. The Muslim upper-class here still rather abjectly depended on upper India for political leadership. The Simla deputation kept entirely silent on the partition and Fuller issues, and though Salimulla had originally suggested the plan for an all-Indian Muslim "confederacy", the Muslim League established its headquarters in Aligarh. As late on 26 December 1908, the *Moslem Chronicle* was complaining that "the few weekly papers we own have no weight, and the few associations that we have suffer from sleeping sickness". The Muslim League, it regretfully noted, had not yet even a provincial branch in Western Bengal, and in any case its membership fee was "prohibitive"--though this rather timid and old-fashioned weekly hastened to add that "we do not want it to be a democratic duma..."[177] It is fairly obivious that the Muslims owed their weighted council representation and separate electorates mainly to a coincidence between their communal ambition and British imperial strategy; the government's volte face on the partition issue in 1911 left them angry but helpless—as Hardinge assured Crewe, the Nawab of Dacca could do nothing, as he was "hopelessly in debt to the Government of India".[178]

What made communalism dangerous in Bengal was the incongruous Muslim combination of aristocratic leadership with antilandlord demagogy—a combination made possible by the peculiar social fact of there being, in the words of the *Moslem Chronicle*, "many districts in Bengal where no large zamindar is a Mohamedan, and in which even petty landowners of the Mohamedan persuasion are but a small minority".[179] The *Mihir-o-Sudhakar* repeatedly denounced

and Serajul Islam, and Abdul Hamid, the editor of the *Moslem Chronicle*. S. R. Wasti, *op. cit.*, p. 224.

[177] *Moslem Chronicle*, 28 November, 26 December 1908.

[178] Hardinge to Crewe, 24 August 1911. Quoted in Tripathi, *op. cit.*, p. 196.

[179] "The Farce of Hindu-Muslim Union"—*Moslem Chronicle*, 26 December 1908.

Hindu zamindari oppression,[180] combined calls for proportionate representation of Muslims in local bodies with suggestions for credit societies and revised interest laws to free the peasant from the clutches of the mahajan,[181] and attacked Hindu rice merchants for buying cheap from the producer and selling dear.[182] Its circulation touched 4000 in 1908—as compared to 1500 of *Soltan* and 500 of *Mussalman*.[183] On 25 November 1906, a Muhammadan Vigilance Committee was set up in Calcutta with Amir Husain and Sirajul Islam as its leading spirits; its purpose was to establish contacts with district Muslim associations and anjumans and so help to prevent "Muhammedan tenantry being ill-treated by Hindu landlords".[184] The *Bengalee* accused the Vigilance Committee of making "groundless statements...against Hindu landlords";[185] the *Mussalman* in its first number (7 December 1906) rather weakly called the formation of such an organisation a "mistake", since the government was there to protect the tenants. The social inhibitions betrayed by such statements were certainly natural, but nonetheless disastrous.

III. The Riots of 1906-7

The first signs of mounting communal tension in certain districts of Bengal became apparent in the early months of 1906. A Bengal government report dated 7 April 1906[186]

[180] *Mihir-o-Sudhakar*, 15 September 1905, 15 March 1907, 7 February 1908—RNP(B) for weeks ending 30 September 1905; 30 March 1907; 15 February 1908.

[181] *Ibid*, 29 September 1905—RNP(B) for week ending 7 October 1905.

[182] *Ibid*, 24 August 1906—RNP(B) for week ending 1 September 1906.

[183] Annual Report on Indian Papers, Volume IV, pp. 121, 129.

[184] Fortnightly Report from Bengal, No. FAR5, 15 December 1906. Abstract of Reports from Bengal during second half of November 1906—Home Public Progs A, January 1907, n. 263; February 1907, n. 152-54.

[185] *Bengalee*, 28 November 1906.

[186] Government of Bengal to Government of India (Home), No. 975 P, 7 April 1906—Home Public Progs A, June 1906, n. 179.

spoke of Hindus and Muslims deciding to sit separately at the Suri bar library in Birbhum, described an assault on a Muslim priest in the village of Magurghona in Jessore—here a possible riot was averted by the timely intervention of Anti-Circular Society leaders from Calcutta[187]—and noted that in Nadia and elsewhere "travelling maulvis" were "making efforts to improve the condition of their poorer coreligionists, the first result of which is the refusal of the labourers to go on performing customary menial offices for the Hindus".[188] The *Charu Mihir* of Mymensingh repeatedly complained that the "illiterate low class cultivators" of the district were harbouring "wild ideas" to the effect that "they should pay rents at the low rates which obtained years ago and not at the high rates which obtain at present". Another issue of the *Charu Mihir* spoke of Muslim bargadars (sharecroppers) "refusing to work under Hindus, and cultivate lands of which the latter are proprietors", and the circulation of a communal pamphalet entitled *Nawab sahaber subichar* (Justice Done by the Nawab Saheb of Dacca) was reported by the same newspaper in the middle of March.[189] The first serious disturbances took place in the Iswargunj and Nandail police stations of Mymensingh district in late April and early May 1906. Led by the influential local preacher Moulvi Samiruddin and a recent convert named Dinesh Neogi, crowds went about the region trying to persuade Muslim servants to desert their Hindu masters, and raiding bazaars to 'rescue' Muslim prostitutes. The house of Harischandra Sarkar, a landholder of Pubail who had tried to offer active resistance to Samiruddin's efforts to take away his Muslim servants, was raided on 6 May, but otherwise, as a Hindu deputy magistrate reported on 25 May, "the mob, though well able to do

[187] On 14 February a 10,000 strong peace meeting was organised at Maghurghona, with Sachindraprasad Bose, Abul Kasem, Abul Husain and Din Mohammed among the speakers. *Ibid*, also "Annual Report of Anti-Circular Society", *Bengalee*, 9 November 1906.

[188] Report of 7 April 1906, *op. cit.*

[189] *Charu Mihir*, 23 January, 27 February, 13 March 1906—RNP(B) for weeks ending 3 February, 10 and 24 March 1906.

so, did not lay their hands on any one's property. In the case of prostitutes alone, they were carried off, property and all. Clearly, therefore, the object of the mob was not plunder, but what, according to the maulvis, religion demanded of them."[190] There was still considerable panic "among the smaller talukdars, the agents of absentee landlords, the shopkeepers, and other Hindu residents"—till the police reinforcements from Dacca suppressed the disturbances, 49 being sent up for trial in a total of 22 cases.[191]

Far more violent and serious were the disturbances of 1907. In the winter and early spring of 1906-7 there were frequent reports of mullas—agents of Salimulla, according to the nationalists[192]—spreading the separatist message through the East Bengal countryside; and communal tracts appeared, like the *Swajati andolan* and the notorious *Lal istahar* (Red Pamphlet), calling for a swajati movement in which the Muslims would totally boycott the Hindus.[193] In December 1906, an official report spoke of Muslim emissaries in Jessore instructing labourers, nurses, midwives and cartmen not to serve Hindus, and four months later, the movement for calling out Muslim servants of Hindus was said to be spreading in Pabna and Dinajpur.[194] A visit of Salimulla to Comilla on 4

[190] Report of Deputy Magistrate Debendraprasad Roy to the District Magistrate of Mymensingh, 25 May 1906, paras 3-6, 10—Home Public Progs A, July 1906, n. 124.

[191] Dacca Commissioner Le Mesurier to Chief Secretary, Government of Eastern Bengal and Assam, No. 2 TJ., Camp Barisal, 6 June 1906, para 4—*ibid.*

[192] Thus the *Hitavarta* of 3 February 1907 accused the Dacca Muslims of spreading the communal message in East Bengal towns and villages. RNP(B) for week ending 9 February 1907.

[193] *Sanjibani*, 20 December 1906—RNP(B) for week ending 29 December 1906. The Red Pamphlet made its first appearance at the Dacca Muslim Educational Conference in December 1906, and was circulating in parts of Rajshahi and in the Kishoregunj subdivision of Mymensingh in April 1907—Home Political Progs A, July 1907, n. 189. The *Bengalee* of 5 May 1907 reprinted the full text of this pamphlet.

[194] Abstract of Reports for Bengal during first half of December 1906. Fortnightly Report from Eastern Bengal and Assam, No. 444T,

March 1907 sparked off serious clashes when a Muslim procession, enraged by what it considered to be an insult to their leader,[195] sacked Hindu shops in the bazaar and beat up some passers-by. Comilla was an extremist stronghold, and with the district magistrate seemingly ignoring Hindu complaints, the latter hit back strongly. Volunteers were called up from Brahmanbaria, Chandpur, Barisal and Chittagong,[196] the Parsi secretary of the nawab was assaulted, and a Muslim shot dead in the street by a Hindu policeman out of uniform.[197] Things quietened down with the arrival of military police and the formation of a joint peace committee by prominent Hindu and Muslim citizens, but the last week of the month saw rioting at the markets of Mogra and Ghatiara (about 30 miles north of Comilla town) in the subdivision of Brahmanbaria. These were apparently provoked by Hindu attempts to enforce the boycott on Muslim shopkeepers, as well as by the spread of rumours about the insult allegedly offered to the nawab.[198] On 21 April Muslims attacked a mela near Jamalpur (Mymensingh district). A Hindu was drowned while trying to flee, and a Durga image was smashed.[199] On the night of 27-28 April, there was a clash involving the use of firearms between a group of volunteers (some of whom had come from Calcutta) and the Muslims

14 March 1907—Home Public Progs A, February 1907, n. 265; April 1907, n. 208.

[195] A broom had been displayed at a window while the nawab's procession was passing—the Chittagong divisional commissioner thought it to be probably accidental. L. Luson's Report No. 11G, 15 March 1907—Home Public Progs A, May 1907, n. 163.

[196] Telegram from Luson to Le Mesurier, Comilla, 10 March 1907—Home Public Progs A, May 1907, n. 162.

[197] Telegram from Luson to Le Mesurier, Comilla, 8 March 1907; Telegram from Viceroy to Secretary of State No. 706, 14 March 1907—Home Public Progs A, 1907, n. 161, 162.

[198] H. Luson's Report No. 147, Chittagong, 10 April 1907—Home Public Progs A, May 1907, n. 169.

[199] Le Mesurier to Risley, 29 April 1907, forwarding a note from Dacca Commissioner R. Nathan, 23 April 1907—Home Political Progs A, July, 1907, n. 13.

in Jamalpur town; this was followed by a panicky flight of most Hindu householders.[200] During the first half of May, the disturbances spread over a wide area in the northern part of Jamalpur subdivision, with Dewangunj and Bakshigunj as the chief centres, and there were riots also in the Phulpur region near Mymensingh town.[201] Property, mainly of Hindu landholders, shopkeepers and mahajans, was this time the principal target, though there was also considerable destruction of images and some cases of rape and attempted forcible conversion. Casualties, however, were few, as "the rioters appear to have been actuated by a desire to do violence to the property rather than to the persons of the Hindus, and as the Hindus offered no resistance..."[202]

The Jamalpur events caused widespread panic, with nationalist newspapers scenting mulla activity in widely scattered parts of Bengal;[203] but actually the riots remained localised, the only disturbances outside Mymensingh and Tippera being at Ekdala hat in Rajshahi and Salonga near Sirajgunj in Pabna, both in the second half of May 1907.[204] The government, while still remarkably soft as regards the instigators of the riots (the classic example being the letting-off of Ibrahim Khan, the publisher of the Red Pamphlet, by the Mymensingh magistrate on the basis of a bond which was "not worth the paper it is written on"),[205] took ener-

[200] Le Mesurier to Risley, 4 and 6 May 1907—*Ibid.*

[201] Government of Eastern Bengal and Assam to Government of India (Home), No. 374C, 17 August 1907—forwarding a report by R. Nathan, para 15. Home Political Progs A, December 1907, n. 58.

[202] *Ibid.* Apart from the man drowned near Jamalpur, only one Hindu was seriously injured while defending his property near Dewangunj. On the same day a blind Muslim and his guide were killed, and a Muslim had been shot dead at Comilla two months before.

[203] During May and June 1907, the *Bande Mataram* printed reports of such activity from Midnapur, Pabna, Chittagong, Jessore and Nadia. *Bande Mataram*, 17 and 21 May, 1, 11 and 28 June 1907.

[204] Fortnightly Report from Eastern Bengal and Assam, No. 108C, 31 May 1907—Home Public Progs A, June 1907, n. 229.

[205] Note by H. Adamson, 26 June 1907, on the release of Ibrahim Khan on 13 June 1907 : "I agree that it was most injudicious to drop

getic action against the actual participants, who were of course mostly of lower-class origin. The *Soltan* complained that 300 Muslims were rotting in Rajshahi jail,[206] and the government of Eastern Bengal and Assam mentioned 68 arrests in Tippera, 200 at Jamalpur and 19 at Sirajgunj while giving a very interesting assurance to the Bengal Chamber of Commerce on 28 May 1907 that firm action would be taken for "maintaining the peace during the coming jute season".[207] The badly-frightened Hindu zamindars of Mymensingh, noted so far for their "very unsatisfactory" political attitude, were now rushing to present welcome addresses to lieutenant-governor Hare.[208] And lower-class turbulence after all could be a pretty dangerous thing for authority as well, as the Sherpur incident in Jamalpur subdivision on 22 September 1907 indicated. What began as a petty market dispute ended with a violent Muslim mob attacking a police barrack; the latter opened fire in self-defence, but mistakenly using ball instead of buckshot, killed two and injured eight.[209]

The riots of 1906-7 set off an acrimonious debate on the question of responsibility. The favourite British theory put the blame largely on the swadeshi movement. Hindu zamindars in their eagerness to enforce the boycott had coerced Muslim tenants and shopkeepers, and this, it was argued, had led to the violent reaction. That boycott at times involved considerable hardship for the poor is a fact admitted later

the case after it had been started, and so far as I can gather from the papers the magistrate acted ultra vires in taking security, and the bond is not worth the paper it is written on... However, the proceedings are proceedings of a court of law, and we as an executive government need not give expression to our opinions about them." Home Political Progs A, July 1907, n. 189.

[206] *Soltan*, 5 July 1907—RNP(B) for week ending 13 July 1907.

[207] *Bande Mataram*, 1 June 1907.

[208] Fortnightly Report from Government of Eastern Bengal and Assam, No. 359C, 12 August 1907, para 1—Home Political Progs A, September 1907, n. 44.

[209] Home Political Progs A, January 1908, n. 44-47.

by Rabindranath,[210] and it is confirmed by the nature of many of the swadeshi cases[211] and indirectly by much information coming from unimpeachable nationalist sources.[212] But a direct causal link with the riots is a much more controversial matter. It appears from the official record that the Mogra Bazaar clash of 23 March 1907 was sparked off by an attempt to enforce the boycott initiated by Nandakumar Sarkar, the ijaradar of the hat.[213] A number of Hindus were convicted in the Jamalpur mela case on the charge of forcibly obstructing the sale of bideshi goods and thus provoking the riot of 21 April 1907.[214] But elsewhere an interesting discrepancy is noticeable between the reports of junior officers on the spot and the summarised versions of these transmitted by their superiors to the Government of India or the India Office. Describing the Iswargunj riots of 1906 to Sir Arthur Godley, the under-secretary of state, Risley placed the pressure by Hindu landlords for boycott as first among the causes;[215] the divisional commissioner of Dacca categorised interference in the interests of swadeshi as the "final grievance which decided the raiyats to defy their former masters";[216] yet the original report of deputy-magistrate Debendraprasad Roy on which all the other accounts were presumably based had actually given quite a different picture of the disturbances. Roy stated that there was not a single swadeshi shop in the whole area, and that some shops selling

[210] *Byadhi-o-pratikar* (1907), *Sadhupay* (1908)—Tagore, R.R.X, pp. 630, 524.

[211] Cf. above. Chapter VI, p. 329.

[212] *Ibid*, pp. 324-25, 329-30.

[213] D.O. from the subdivisional officer of Brahmanbaria to the District Magistrate of Tippera, Akhaura 27 March 1907—Enclosure III A to Chittagong Commissioner H. Luson's Report No. 147 T of 10 April 1907. Home Public Progs A, May 1907, n. 169.

[214] *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 5 December 1907.

[215] D.O. No. 145 (Public) of 12 July 1906 from H. H. Risley to Sir A. Godley, para 30. Home Public Progs A, July 1906, n. 124.

[216] Letter No. 2 TJ, 6 June 1906, from Dacca Commissioner Le Mesurier to the Chief Secretary of the Government of Eastern Bengal and Assam—Enclosure III of above, *Ibid*.

bilati had been opened only two months before, with one at Dhitpur supplying "the requirements of the zamindar regularly". "The swadeshi organisation never took a firm hold in this part of the country, and I have the direct avowal of Syed Nurul Huda, the Muhammadan marriage registrar of Iswargunj, that the present disturbance is not in any way connected with Swadeshi, but that the eyes of the Muhammadans have been opened by the preaching of the **maulvis**, to the exactions of the Hindu landlords."[217] Next year, divisional commissioner R. Nathan's survey of the Mymensingh riots named boycott as "an important general factor"; yet he himself admitted that swadeshi had been relatively weak in Jamalpur, while his subordinates had quite categorically stated that the movement was virtually nonexistent in Dewangunj and Phulpur, while the proswadeshi shopkeepers attacked at Bakshigunj had been notorious usurers as well.[218] It is also very significant that the *Nawab saheber subichar* and the *Red Pamphlet* while enumerating Hindu misdeeds with great gusto remained entirely silent about the alleged suffering caused by the boycott.[219]

The behaviour of some local officials, British as well as Muslim, provided some substance for the oft-repeated nationalist charge of government instigation and connivance. Thus the *Sandhya* accused subinspector Fazlur Rahman of encouraging the Mogra hat rioters[220]—a charge

[217] Deputy-Magistrate Debendraprasad Roy to the District Magistrate of Mymensingh, 25 May 1906—*Ibid.*

[218] R. Nathan's Report, forwarded by the Government of Eastern Bengal and Assam to the Government of India (Home), No. 374C, 17 August 1907, pp. 14, 26—Home Political Progs A, December 1907, n. 58. Mymensingh District Magistrate Clarke to Nathan, Dewangunj, 8 May 1907; First Report of Additional District Magistrate Garlick to Nathan, 18 May 1907; Clarke to Nathan, 20 May 1907—Home Political Progs A, July 1907, n. 13-14, 16.

[219] As a statement by 15 Hindu leaders pointed out in July 1907 in a refutation of Morley's accusation in the House of Commons that boycott had been the principal cause of the riots. Home Political Progs A, July 1907, n. 182-92. Appendix I.

[220] *Sandhya*, 29 March 1907—RNP(B) for week ending 6 April 1907.

largely confirmed by the comment of his superior which appears in the official record: "Fazlur Rahman was plucky enough, but his sympathies were rather too obviously with his coreligionists."[221] The district magistrate himself "showed a most unfortunate want of discretion" in doing virtually nothing during the first two days of the Comilla disturbances except informing the Hindu leaders who had sought his help that the latter "were really responsible for what had occurred", and that the whole affair was just "a temporary ebullition of temper" caused by the insult to the nawab.[222] At Jamalpur the police at first busied themselves mainly with disarming the Hindu volunteers who had barricaded themselves inside the Dayamoyee temple on the night of 27-28 April, and they committed an act of somewhat doubtful legality in searching without warrant the cutchery of the Gauripur estate for arms.[223] The contrast between the treatment of Ibrahim Khan and the hounding down of Liakat Husain was glaring, and no serious efforts seem to have been made to trace the author of the even more incendiary *Bilati-barjan rahashya* (The Mysteries of Boycott) which appeared a few months later without a press-line.[224] But in all this the British were only utilising tensions already present in Bengali society—"Satan cannot enter till he finds a flaw", as Rabindranath wisely remarked a few months after the Jamalpur riots.[225]

[221] D.O. of Brahmanbaria Subdivisional Officer to District Magistrate Lees, Akhaura, 27 March 1907. Enclosure III A to Luson's Report, *op. cit.* Home Public Progs A, May 1907, n. 163.

[222] Memorandum of H. D. Lees, 13 March 1907. The critical comment about Lees' conduct occurs in H. Luson's Report No. 11G, 15 March 1907—Home Public Progs A, May 1907, n. 163.

[223] Le Mesurier to Risley, 4 May and 6 May 1907—Home Political Progs A, July 1907, n. 13. H. A. Stuart later commented that "there was undoubtedly...mismanagement at Comilla and we have yet to see whether the searches of the Hindu zamindars' cutcherees...were entirely regular and correct". Note of 23 June 1907—Home Political Progs A, July 1907, n. 189.

[224] *Bengalee*, 19 July 1907.

[225] *Byadhi-o-pratikar*, Sravana 1314 (July-August 1907), Tagore. R.R.X, p. 627.

The nationalists laid a great deal of emphasis on the role of communal leaflets and mulla propaganda in fomenting the riots—and behind all such activities they suspected the machinations of their bogey-man, Nawab Salimulla of Dacca. The official accounts tend to minimise both factors: thus Le Mesurier argued that most copies of the *Nawab saheber subichar* had been seized by the police before the Iswargunj riots,[226] while the *Red Pamphlet* apparently did not reach the Jamalpur-Dewangunj area before the disturbances there.[227] Nathan tried to play down also the role of the maulvis, about whom "careful enquiries", he stated, had shown "very little result".[228] But Maulvi Samiruddin had been very active indeed at Iswargunj the year before, where religious meetings (waz) had often preceded the disturbances; though at least part of his motive seems to have been the very secular one of getting into the local board—which he managed to do on 27 April after rowdy scenes by Muslim mobs had prevented many Hindus from voting.[229] In the Brahmanbaria area of north Tippera, the riots had been preceded by a Muslim "awakening", through meetings organised by the local muktear Munshi Abdur Rauf.[230] The first report on the Phulpur outbreak attributed it mainly "to the preaching of Muhammedan fanatics who have been going about urging Muhammedans to convert all Hindus to their faith".[231] Further investigations found little evidence of any visit by outside agents, but brought out the fact that there were "a large number of maulvis from Noa-

[226] Dacca Commissioner Le Mesurier to Chief Secretary Lyon, 6 June 1906, para 7—Home Public Progs A, July 1906 n. 124, Enclosure III.
[227] R. Nathan's Report, *op. cit.*, p. 31—Home Political Progs A, December 1907 n. 58.
[228] *Ibid*, p. 30.
[229] Report of Debendraprasad Roy, 25 May 1906, paras 3-6—Home Public Progs A, July 1906, n. 124.
[230] Note by A. E. Scroope, former Subdivisional Officer of Brahmanbaria, 29 March 1907—H. Luson's Report, 10 April 1907, Enclosure I. Home Public Progs A, May 1907, n. 169.
[231] First Report of Additional District Magistrate Garlick, 18 May 1907—Home Political Progs A, July 1907, n. 14.

khali, Tippera and Chittagong permanently settled in Phulpur thana as school teachers".[232] At Dewangunj and Bakshigunj, "notices were found stuck up calling on Muhammedans to loot and beat Hindus and to marry their widows, as government and nawab of Dacca had ordered it, and it was asserted that fanatical maulvis had preached to this effect..."[233] In the Ekdala hat case, the crown prosecutor attributed the looting of Hindu shops to Wahhabi incitement.[234]

Salimulla's bland disclaimer two months after the Mymensingh riots of all responsibility for the mullas who had often used his name is not particularly convincing.[235] But it would be quite unhistorical to accept in its entirety the nationalist theory that the rioters were all hired agents of the nawab. The communal-minded moulvi, muktear or petty official represented in fact a definite trend within rural Muslim society, brought into existence by the spread of education stimulating social ambition among the upper stratum of the peasantry—now becoming relatively prosperous through jute cultivation. The Iswargunj riot accounts vividly illustrate this development. "With the increase of education the cleverer young men passed through schools and madrassas and came back to preach a movement of social and religious reform"[236]—in this way the revivalist ideas disseminated at

[232] Second Report of Additional District Magistrate Garlick, 22 May 1907—Home Political Progs A, July 1907, n. 15.

[233] Report of Mymensingh Magistrate L. O. Clarke to Dacca Divisional Commissioner R. Nathan, 20 May 1907—Home Political Progs A, July 1907, n. 16.

[234] *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 2 December 1907.

[235] *Mussalman*, 12 July 1907. Garlick's argument in extenuation of the nawab is even less plausible, "his own estates, none of which are in the disturbed area, have always been perfectly quiet and free from disturbances"—Salimulla was hardly likely to encourage antizamindar sentiments among his own tenants. First Report of Garlick, 18 May 1907—Home Political Progs A, July 1907, n. 14.

[236] Le Mesurier to Lyon, 2RJ, 6 June 1906, para 10—describing the background of the Iswargunj riots. Home Public Progs A, July 1906. n. 124.

the seminaries of Dacca and Chittagong percolated down to the village level. "Their education gives them a certain status in society elsewhere, but when they return home, the local Hindu zamindars will not regard them as anything better than cultivators or tailors as their fathers were... Maulvi Samiruddin, the Muhammedan preacher...went to see the Gangatia zamindar of this neighbourhood, and seated himself in his presence. The latter, a high caste and orthodox Hindu. had him turned out of the house and insulted."[237] The *Nawab saheber subichar* which appeared shortly afterwards had as its main theme zamindar Atul Babu of Gangatia being made to eat beef by the nawab of Dacca for having fined a Muslim raiyat for cow-slaughter.[238]

Even if the mullas are regarded as Salimulla's paid agents, what would require explanation is the response they managed to obtain from the Muslim lower classes. That the real answer lies in the antizamindar and antimahajan tone of communal propaganda and activity is evident even from nationalist Hindu sources. The forebodings expressed by the *Charu Mihir* in the first months of 1906 have been cited already. After the Iswargunj outbreak, the *Bengalee* of 1 June 1906 commented that the Muslim peasants of Mymensingh had always been in "quite a subordinate position", but there had been little conflict so far due to their acceptance of "something like feudal relation"; but now the maulvis had instigated them "to assert their own rights against the Hindus, to refrain from serving under them, to try to evade payment of rent to their Hindu landlords or at least never to pay rent at any higher rate than three rupees and six annas". In the wake of the Jamalpur riots, the *Bande Mataram* of 17 May 1907 published a letter describing the contemporary struggle as essentially "between the ignorant multitude and the educated few". "In the Eastern Bengal...the low class Mahommedans represent manual

[237] Clarke to Le Mesurier, No. 1186J, 1 June 1906, para 16—*Ibid.*
[238] Extracts from the *Nawab saheber subichar*, contained in Debendraprasad Roy's Report of 25 May 1906, para 5—*Ibid.*

labour and the Hindus with a sprinkling of higher class Mahommedans represent capital." Four days later the same newspaper printed a report from Pabna describing the impact of maulvi propaganda on the Muslims there: "A queer notion seems to have taken possession of their mind that they will no longer have to pay any rents to anybody." The maulvis were said to be "inciting the Mahommedans to eke out their livelihood by plundering the Hindu kafirs". The report mentions incidentally that there had been no rain in the district for some time, and prices were "abnormally high". It is interesting that the *Mihir-o-Sudhakar* too named not boycott but the "oppression of the Hindu zamindars towards their raiyats" as "the first and the most prominent cause" of the riots, mentioning in particular insecurity of tenure, abwabs and ban on cow-slaughter.[239]

Another aspect of communal propaganda is indicated by the *Charu Mihir* of 22 May 1906: "The Maulvis go about preaching that the end of British rule in India is at hand and that the day is coming for the revival of Islam; that the Lieutenant-Governor B. Fuller has been compelled to establish dushti, i.e. an alliance with the Nawab of Dacca."[240] An apocalyptic note is indeed evident in the *Nawab saheber subichar*, with Salimullah as the rather unlikely messiah;[241] he is said to have conquered Assam, Sylhet, Chittagong—and allah permitting, he might one day conquer the whole world. The Hindus petition against the treatment of Atul Babu, but the viceroy has no power over the nawab, while

[239] *Mihir-o-Sudhakar*, 14 June 1907—RNP(B) for week ending 22 June 1907.

[240] RNP(B) for week ending 2 June 1906.

[241] Debendraprasad Roy's Report, *op. cit.*, contains the following transliterated extract:

Kattek mulluk Shaha karen dakhal
Mama sadhya nahi nam likhi se sakal
Asam pahar sab araze Assam
Sylhet dakhal kare or Chattegam...
Alla chahe thora din duniya tamam
Dakhal kariya dibe Shaha neknam/

the emperor and prime minister in England have a good laugh and uphold the judgement. The *Red Pamphlet* combines vitriolic abuse of the Hindus with a more direct appeal to the peasants: "...in one day we can send all Hindus to hell. In Bengal, consider, you form the majority; you are the peasant, from agriculture comes all wealth. Where did the Hindu get his wealth from? He had nothing, he has stolen it from you and become wealthy...Through the swajati movement we shall develop ourselves."[242] The pamphlet contains a poem recalling the glories of the Arab conquests, and another calling on Muslims to shun the Hindus and no longer surrender their wealth to them.[243]

In the urban riots of Comilla, the Muslim mob was "composed partly of students and partly of ordinary Muhammedans of the lower class in the bazaar". Among the latter many were "gariwalas who earn a large part of their living by driving Hindus of the better classes to court, the railway station and elsewhere". The divisional commissioner reported that "bringing the leading Hindu and Muhammedan gentlemen together...was an easy thing to do"; the problem was that the latter had little control or influence over their lower class coreligionists.[244] Giving the background to the Mogra riots, the *Bengalee* of 29 March 1907 asserted that "low-class Muslims of Maniardi village did not pay rent regularly to Hindu ijaradars of Mogra hat where they had some shops".

[242] Full text in *Bengalee*, 5 May 1907:
— ekdinei Hinduke jahanname pathaite pari/dekha, bangadeshe tomader sankhya adhik, tomra krishak, krishi kajei dhana utpattir beej; Hindu dhana kotha paila, Hindur dhana bindumatre nai/Hindu kaushale tomader dhana niya dhani haiyacche/...amra swajati andolan kariya atmyonnoti kariba/

[243] *Shunare moslemgan haye ek man*
Diyo na Hindur ghare apanar dhan /
Moslem adham shei Moslem adham,
Hindur sahita kare bande mataram—Ibid.

[244] H. Luson's Report, 11G, 15 March 1907, para 15—Home Public Progs A, May 1907, n. 163.

In Mymensingh district, with its big and often absentee Hindu landlords, the Tenancy Act of 1885 had become virtually "a dead letter". At Dewangunj the rents of occupancy raiyats had been enhanced through extrajudicial agreement every 5 or 7 years (in place of the legal 15).[245] A petition dated 26 January 1906 from a Mymensingh Raiyats' Association, said to have been founded in January 1903, complained that there had been a tenfold enhancement of rent since 1793, the tenants were being made to pay cesses for digging tanks or wells, planting trees and constructing pucca dwellings, and that Surjyakanta Acharyya was demanding a 'mathote' of 50 per cent on the annual rent "in this year of scarcity". It also alleged that moneylenders were charging a monthly interest of up to 20 per cent.[246] The petition with its unusually sophisticated tone and its demand for free transfer rights to jotes obviously emanated from the better-off jotedar section of the raiyats, who were benefiting from the high prices of primary products and the roaring trade in jute. Such men, however, were probably all the more susceptible to revivalist propaganda—as the district magistrate of Mymensingh pointed out, "the raiyats being well off do not mind paying cesses for most purposes, but object to pay for Kali pujas and other kinds of idolatry. The zamindars too object to their killing cows."[247]

Before and during the Iswargunj riots, there was a widespread "wild and extravagant" expectation that the government would reduce the rent to Rs 3--6 per ara (a local unit of about 5 bighas). It is interesting that the administrative report of 1882-83 had mentioned an identical demand—probably, as Le Mesurier commented, this was "a reminiscence of a former pargana rate".[248] At Bakshigunj next year, the

[245] Note by R. Nathan, 6K—July 1907, p. 26.—Home Political Progs A, December 1907, n. 58.

[246] Debendraprasad Roy's Report, 25 May 1906, *op. cit.*—Home Public Progs A, July 1906. n. 124.

[247] Clarke to Le Mesurier, 1 June 1906, para 14—*Ibid.*

[248] Debendraprasad Roy, *op. cit.*, paras 7, 9. Le Mesurier to Lyon, 6 June 1906, para 5—*Ibid.*

first targets were the shops of Shaha moneylenders; wherever possible, the chests were broken and "the bonds were taken out and torn into shreds".[249] Over and above the exorbitant interest, the mahajans had recently started to levy an Iswar britti for the upkeep of Hindu images. "It is particularly worthy of note that both at Bakshigunj and at Dewangunj the rioting began by an attack upon the idol which had been erected by the hated Iswar britti..."[250] Once started, iconoclasm of course gathered a momentum of its own, as for instance at Melamgunj where the Muslims—all "respectable citizens", according to the magistrate who tried them—"smashed the Kalibari near the market and then went from dwelling to dwelling destroying the family idol houses".[251]

At Dewangunj and Phulpur the contagion spread to the lowest ranks of rural society, and the official record spoke of something like a general "plunder of the rich by the poor", with Hindu cultivators joining in the loot at some places and "Mussalmans and marwaris" being robbed "nearly as much as Bengalis".[252] Garlick reported from Phulpur that what had been roused was "not only the religious fervour of the respectable cultivators but the criminal instincts of the budmashes" (ruffians) and he deduced from the fact that at Defuliya paddy had been taken away but sacks containing seed grain spared the conclusion that "the rioters were not mere agriculturists, and probably had no land, and were thorough budmashes".[253] The Dewangunj disturbance was "purely one of the budmash population rising upon owners of property. The budmashes and dacoits

[249] Note by R. Nathan, p. 27—*op. cit.*
[250] *Ibid.*
[251] *Ibid*, p. 31.
[252] Clarke to Nathan, 20 May 1907; Garlick to Clarke, 18 May 1907; Clarke to Nathan, 8 May 1907. Home Political Progs A, July 1907, n. 16, 14, 13.
[253] Garlick to Clarke, 18 May 1907—Home Political Progs A, July 1907, n. 14. The social assumption is interesting, and reminds one of that other gem of Anglo-Indian officialese—the "criminal tribe".

seem to be 70 per cent of the population" (sic)[254]. Such semiproletarian elements must have been hard hit by the rise in prices.

But if the social distress and discontent were genuine enough, it must also be emphasised that their distorted expression through communal riots and plunder robbed the outburst of all permanent value from the point of view of the peasant. The *Soltan* of 28 June 1907 gave a vivid description of the sufferings of Muslims in the riot-affected areas—harassment by the punitive police, heavy judicial expenses forcing sale or mortgage of lands, refusal of loans by Hindu mahajans, seizure of land for rent-arrears by zamindars.[255] It charged the party represented by the *Mihir-o-Sudhakar* with responsibility for all such woes,[256] and in fact the Muslim communal leaders seem to have used the peasants as so much cannon-fodder in their fight with the Hindus for jobs and council seats. No organised attempt was apparently made to provide funds or legal aid for the Muslim accused in the riot cases. When the authorities decided to take no action against the policemen responsible for the Sherpur firing, it was a Hindu newspaper—the *Basumati*—which protested;[257] the lieutenant-governor on the other hand could find solace in the fact "that educated Mahommedans have altogether refused to respond in any way to the attempts made by certain newspapers, well known to be inspired by influences hostile to Government, to draw them into regarding the occurrence as in any way an injustice to the Mahommedans of the province".[258]

[254] Clarke to Nathan, 8 May 1907—Home Political Progs A, July 1907, n. 13.

[255] RNP(B) for week ending 6 July 1907.

[256] *Soltan*, 7 February 1908—RNP(B) for week ending 15 February 1908.

[257] *Basumati*, 23 November 1907—RNP(B) for week ending 30 November 1907.

[258] Government of Eastern Bengal and Assam to Government of India (Home) No. 7660, 28 November 1907—Home Political Progs A, January 1908, n. 45.

In a previous chapter[259] I have tried to bring out the crucial importance of the riots of 1906-7 in the evolution of nationalist thought and practice. Moderate efforts to meet the challenge through talks with Muslim upper-class leaders obviously ignored the deeper roots of the problem, while their appeals to the government for strict enforcement of law and order sounded insufferably mendicant to the radical youth. Rabindranath offered a far more profound analysis of the riots, and the rethinking they induced in him led the poet to make a decisive and final break with the traditionalist ideas which had swayed him for some time. But his call for building a mahajati on the basis of a repudiation of all sectarian barriers and prejudices, however sacrosanct, and his appeals for patient constructive work in villages to bridge the gulf between the bhadralok and the masses, found little response from among his contemporaries. Far more attractive seemed the message of the *Bande Mataram* and the *Yugantar*, with its militancy and romantic appeal, its promise of a heroic and yet essentially simple road to freedom, and its assumption—so conveniently attuned to bhadralok preconceptions—that the rioters were mere hired agents, no more than "hooligans" and "Indian Black Hundreds".[260] But 'revolution' with the rural masses inert or hostile could mean in practice only action by an elite, and so extremism became transmuted into terrorism, and the *Raja kc* theme of Hindu-Muslim unity gave place to the *Sonar bangla* call for "Russian" methods as exemplified apparently by the shooting down of a Muslim at Comilla.[261]

The impact of the riots on Muslim thought, at least as reflected in the newspapers, seems at first sight much less evident. The sharp changes that occurred in Muslim politics during the succeeding decade were due to quite different factors. If the *Mussalman* after 1908 for a time drifted away from nationalism, that was because of the lure of ex-

259 Cf. above, Chapter II, pp. 81-88.

260 "The East Bengal Disturbances"—editorial in *Bande Mataram*, 25 May 1907.

261 Cf. above, Chapter VI, pp. 273-74.

tra council seats and not the memory of the Mymensingh riots. The bloody riots in Bihar and United Provinces during 1917-18—definitely provoked by the Hindus, according to Dr R. C. Majumdar[262]—did not prevent the rapprochement between the political leaders of the two communities, a process which on the Muslim side had been set off by the abrogation of the partition and greatly accelerated by the British treatment of Turkey.

But that the main lesson of 1906-7 from the Muslim point of view—communalism to be really effective in Bengal must have an agrarian base—had not been entirely forgotten is indicated by a fascinating pamphlet entitled *Krishak-bandhu* (Friend of the Peasant) published from Calcutta in 1910.[263] This 112-page poem ends with the conventional conclusions of Muslim separatism : attacks on the Congress, moderate as well as extremist, as an essentially Hindu body, the danger of a swaraj which Hindus would surely dominate, a call for support for the Muslim League, evocation of past glories of Islam—the only unexpected reference in this section is to the "socialists" who have to be fought along with the terrorists.[264] But all this is preceded by a long and often quite moving account of the woes of the peasant, on whose back-breaking labour society rests, and who is yet oppressed by all[265]—and the author specifies the zamindar with his perpetual cesses and fines and tyrannical subordina-

[262] *History of the Freedom Movement in India*, Volume II (1963), pp. 249-50 .

[263] Bangiya nireeha krishakdiger param shubhanudhyayi /*Krishak bandhu*/Garib Shayer pranita/Calcutta—1317 (1910)

[264] —*Shantimoy e bharate je sab shaitan /*
Biplab aniya badhe manusher prana/ /
Naradham se sabai desh-shatru bate/...
E dale bangiya hindu, marhatta gana/...
Punjaber aryadal hate bahu gan/
Socialister dal karecche gathan//...
Kara chai ihader mul-utpatan/ /
—*Ibid*, p. 99.

[265] —*Tumee shashyer raja, bhumir malik/*
Sakaler cheye tabo gaurab adhik/

tes, the mahajan charging exorbitant interest, the police, the shopkeeper, even the village headman. As the poem proceeds, the exploiters merge in the figure of the babu, who is also the Congress stalwart, while the peasant is identified with the Muslim and urged to remember his solidarity with his coreligionists.[266] The author deftly sidetracks the antifeudal conclusions which might have seemed implicit in his premises—his advice to the peasant is not a struggle against the zamindar or mahajan, but selfimprovement through education on proper Islamic lines. The peasants are urged to follow the Koran, pay zakat regularly to the mulla, reject the advice of false prophets preaching syncretism and remember the glories of Islam.[267] They are also

Tomar sramer phal sakelei khay/
Kintu toma pane keho phiriya na chay//

—*Ibid*, p. 1.

266 *Tomar arthete babu ukil moktar/*
Bhuri phulaiya mari dey ki bahar//
Tomar arthete babugiri babuder/
Tumi na janmale shashya maran tader//
'Congo-rasa' 'ranga-rasa' kari babudala/
Katadin karila bharat talamala//
Banger krishak pray saba musalman/
Hindu habe dui teen ana pariman//
Tomar kalyane jamidar—jamidar/
Tumi bina astita kothay thake tar?...
Musalman matreyi je paraspar bhai/
E katha bhula na keha, bhula nahi chai/

—*Ibid*, pp. 16-20, 24.

267 *Dharma upadesh shuna manaha koran/*
Kariben dayamoy mangal bidhan//...
Samay zakat dibe na karibe der//
Challish bhager ek bhag dite habe
Ihar uttam phal parakale pabe//...
Bangalar nana sthane nerar fakir/
Jibanta pishach rupe hayecche jahir//
Shaitaner chela, tara adat shaitan/...
Uhara 'moslem' nahe, janibe 'ekin'/...
Apanake heena jati kabhu na bhabibe/
'Moslem' sarbaccha jati, manete rakhibe//

—*Ibid*, pp. 26, 39, 45-46.

advised to form anjumans and rally behind the Muslim League. How all this is going to help them to end the oppression sketched out in such vivid detail in the first stanzas of the poem is of course not explained. On the economic plane, there is the recurrent advice for agricultural improvements through wells and canals (the Punjab example is cited here), improved techniques and seeds, and crop diversification; the Muslim peasant is urged to colonise virgin lands in Sylhet, Cachar, Assam, the Sunderbans and elsewhere, and even try to become a trader in his own right.[268] The prosperous farmers of Transvaal and Denmark are held up as examples worthy of imitation.[269] The poem visualises, in fact, something like a kulak programme —though there is also the pious advice that the rich peasant should not turn an exploiter and usurer himself.[270]

A generation later, Fazlul Huq's Krishak Praja Party would sweep the 1937 elections in Bengal with its jotedar base and antizamindar programme. Driven into the arms of the Muslim League, at least in part by the social inhibitions of the Bengal Congress leadership, Fazlul Huq's party would impart to its ally a mass-basis which the latter had never enjoyed before in Bengal.[271] And so a national movement which had entered its militant phase with one partition of Bengal would culminate forty-two years later with another, far more permanent and agonising partition.

[268] *Ibid*, pp. 29-35, 58-68. Even the districts in Bengal suitable for different kinds of crops are specified in the poem.
[269] *Ibid*, pp. 47-49.
[270] *Ibid*, p. 79.
[271] Gankovsky and Gordon-Polonskaya, *op. cit.*, pp. 65, 80-81.

Chapter Nine

EARLY REVOLUTIONARY TERRORISM

I. Sources

No aspect of the swadeshi age has received more attention in biographies, memoirs and historical works than revolutionary terrorism with its quite unsurpassable romantic appeal, and yet a really objective account of the early days of that movement based on first-hand sources still remains extremely difficult to reconstruct. Participants in an underground movement cannot afford the luxury of keeping private papers. Precious little has survived—and that often only in the form of possibly distorted official excerpts or filed copies—of even the legally published militant journals and pamphlets of the pre-1908 era with its relatively lenient press laws.[1] Some of the most interesting of the home political files seem to have been destroyed,[2] free use of the others was limited till very recently by a totally incomprehensible home ministry censorship, and the official sources in general suffer from certain fairly obvious limitations and distortions. They tend to categorise the revolutionaries into neat groups, no doubt with an eye to future prosecution advantages—it is well-known, for example, that the Yugantar Party was largely an artificial official construct made about the time

[1] Thus for *Yugantar*, *Nabasakti* and *Sandhya* I have had to depend on the Reports on the Native Press, except for a few stray copies preserved in private collections—most notably the issue of *Yugantar* dated 26 Baisakh 1315 (9 May 1908) giving the first reactions to the Maniktala arrests, which I have been able to obtain from the Private Papers of Aswinicoomar Banerji.

[2] The 'Not Transferred' files at the National Archives, judging from their titles, must have contained much fascinating material.

of the Howrah Conspiracy Case.[3] And since police informers have to earn their keep, their reports are never in want of lurid detail and at times involve the most unlikely persons—a classic example being the "History of the Bomb Affairs" by 'L', which is annexed to the dossiers of all the nine deportees of December 1908.[4]

A comprehensive account of revolutionary terrorism must try to combine archival material—as well as of course the famous Rowlatt Report on 1918—with a comparative study of reminiscences of participants in the movement, of which we have a considerable number. Such memoirs, written for the most part at the fag-end of lives full of suffering and frustration by men whose personal knowledge, however direct, was bound to be fragmentary due to the conspiratorial nature of the movement itself, naturally vary greatly in quality. It is difficult to take too seriously for instance Sarala Debi's naively pretentious account of how revolutionary leaders like Jatindranath Banerji danced attendance on her,[5] while Charuchandra Dutta's somewhat fantastic tales of far-flung revolutionary conspiracies seem as unverifiable as 'L's account of the bomb affair.[6] The reminiscences of Barindra-

[3] Gopal Haldar, *Revolutionary Terrorism—Studies in the Bengal Renaissance* (1958), pp. 242-43. The very interesting charts constructed by Amales Tripathi (*The Extremist Challenge*—Appendix C) on the basis of intelligence branch records possibly suffer from a similar bias.

[4] Home Political Progs Deposit, November 1909, n. 1-9. According to this report, practically all leaders of Bengal politics from Surendranath Banerji downwards were involved in the bomb conspiracy. With so many rich contributors, it is a little difficult to understand why the revolutionaries had to take to the path of political dacoity from as early as 1906. Most startling of all is the comment on Rabindranath—"Babu Rabindranath Tagore, as a friend of Arabindo Ghosh, was the aristocratic champion of the party. He is an immaculate turncoat and has managed to save his skin by openly recanting his former revolutionary ideas and principles."

[5] Sarala Debi, *Jibaner jharapata* (1957), pp. 178-81.

[6] Charuchandra Dutta, *Purana katha—upasanghar* (1952). Thus the story of a conspiracy to murder Curzon in Delhi (?) which this civilian friend of Aurobindo claims to have hatched along with a well-

kumar Ghosh[7] and Upendranath Banerji[8] make good reading as adventure stories but, despite some interesting sidelights, their flippant style has robbed them of much historical value. Dr R. C. Majumdar has made considerable use of of Nalinikishore Guha's *Banglay biplab-bad*, first published in 1923. Historically important as perhaps the earliest full-scale defence of the terrorist movement, this account by a Dacca Anushilan militant presents as regards its facts mainly a rehash of the Rowlatt Report, and is highly conformist and uncritical in its general outlook—and we are not surprised to find in its second edition (1929) a violent attack on Hemchandra Kanungo. The early history of the Calcutta Anushilan has been related by Jibantara Haldar on the basis of the discussions the author had with survivors after independence.[9] Aurobindo has given a frank account of his role in the terrorist movement in the Pondicherry publication entitled *Sri Aurobindo on Himself and on the Mother* (1953). Jadugopal Mukherji's reminiscences[10] contain much information about the Yugantar groups and show considerable critical insight; unfortunately both fact and criticism are entombed in a mass of verbiage and repetition.

But the two works of this type which may fairly be classed as outstanding are those of Bhupendranath Dutta[11] and Hemchandra Kanungo,[12] both belonging to the very first group of revolutionaries. Here a mass of very interesting factual detail is combined with pitilessly frank criticism of the dark sides of the movement. Dutta focuses on the lack of contact with the masses which he thinks has doomed the Indian revolution so far to failure; Kanungo is concerned

known scientist, a world-famous writer, and Okakura (*op. cit.*, p. 9) has no corroboration whatsoever.

7 Barindrakumar Ghosh, *Amar atmakatha* (1931).

8 Upendranath Banerji, *Nirbashiter atmakatha* (7th edition, 1960).

9 Jibantara Haldar, *Anushilan samitir sankhipta itihas* (1950, 1965).

10 Jadugopal Mukherji, *Biplabi jibaner smriti* (1956).

11 Bhupendranath Dutta, *Bharater dwitiya swadhinata sangram* (1926, 1949).

12 Hemchandra Kanungo, *Banglay biplab prachesta* (1928).

more with the evil effects of Hindu religiosity and the blunders of the Aurobindo-Barin Ghosh leadership. The latter's remarks on the constant tendency in revolutionary circles to exaggerate the degree of popular response and to indulge in false reporting and in what he unkindly calls "truth in anticipation" sound painfully realistic and familiar;[13] such comments might serve as salutary checks on the whole literature of revolutionary memoirs.

II. First Revolutionary Groups

The prehistory of the revolutionary movement in Bengal may perhaps be traced back to the 1860s and '70s, when we come across the first references to 'akharas' (gymnasia) of educated youth with a political purpose, as well as to "secret societies" of a sort, with a maximum of conspiratorial ritual and a quite negligible minimum of practical activity. Promotion of physical culture was an important element in the Hindu mela programme,[14] with Nabagopal Mitra setting up an 'akhara' in Sankar Ghosh Lane.[15] Rabindranath has left a well-known account of the secret society game as played by the young Tagores in the 1870s with Jyotirindranath as leader and Rajnarayan Basu, the principal source of inspiration;[16] while Surendranath's lectures on Mazzini seem to have led to some attempts to imitate the carbonari among the students of Calcutta.[17] Bhupendranath Dutta tells us of 'akharas' set up in Hooghly by Tinkari Chattopadhyay, a

[13] *Ibid*, pp. 30-32. This occupational disease of overenthusiastic revolutionaries has affected many other movements—one example would be the Communist Party of India during 1948-49 while pursuing the 'Ranadive line'.

[14] *Chaitra mela—dwitiya barsher karjyabibaran*—Reprinted in *Sahitya-Parishad Patrika*, Vol. 67, No. 2 (1367), p. 107.

[15] Bepinchandra Pal, *Hindu mela o nabagopal mitra—Navayuger Bangla* (1955), pp. 143-44.

[16] For this 'Sanjibani Sabha', code name 'Hamchupmuhaf', see Rabindranath Tagore, *Jivan-smriti* (1912)—R.R. XVII, pp. 349-52.

[17] R. C. Majumdar, *The Genesis of Extremism—Studies in the Bengal Renaissance*, p. 199.

nephew of Bhudeb Mukhopadhyay, allegedly with the advice of Bankimchandra (posted in that district between 1876 and 1880) and Jogendranath Vidyabhushan.[18] Brahmabandhab Upadhyay in his student days ran away from home twice in abortive bids to join the native army of Gwalior[19]—a path which Jatindranath Banerji was to follow with greater success twenty years later—and Charuchandra Dutta says that a secret ambition to get military training from England itself lay behind his agreeing to sit for the civil service examination there.[20] Interest in militant politics seems to have died down for a while after the mid-'80s. But by the turn of the century, as Jadugopal Mukherji recalls, physical culture had become something like a craze among the educated young men of Calcutta, with several Bengali circus parties and 'akharas' organised by men like Narayanchandra Basak and Gourhari Mukhopadhyay.[21]

Rigidly excluded from military service, constantly accused of effeminacy by the rulers, it was natural for young Bengalis to seek psychological compensation in a cult of physical strength and a somewhat exaggerated faith in the efficacy of purely military methods[22], and the mounting number of cases of intimidation and assault by Anglo-Indians must have helped to make the 'akharas' seem even more indispensable. With physical culture came to be combined in course of time moral and religious training, on the model of Bankimchandra's theory of 'Anushilan'—the development of all human faculties in the service of the country and of a re-

[18] Bhupendranath Dutta, *op cit.*, pp. 87-88.

[19] Described by Upadhyay himself in *Amar bharat uddhar*, first published in *Swaraj*, 12 and 19 Jaistha 1314 (1907).

[20] Charuchandra Dutta, *op.cit.*, pp. 3-4.

[21] Jadugopal Mukherji, *op. cit.*, pp. 116-17. Jibantara Haldar, *op. cit.*, pp. 3-4. There was for instance Professor Bose's Circus, hailed by Vivekananda. Gourhari Mukherji—incidentally, Jadugopal's uncle—was the athletic master of Satischandra Basu, the founder of the original Anushilan Samiti.

[22] Nirad C. Chaudhuri has made an interesting analysis of this psychology—"Military power was to us the key to the political problem"—*The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian*, Book II, Chapter 3. p. 249.

juvenated Hindu faith.[23] Vivekananda's teachings in the 1890s gave a tremendous stimulus to national pride—tacitly identified with Hindu resurgence—and inculcated a spirit of social service. There was also the impact of events abroad—the Boer War, which set Rajnarayan Basu's nephew Jnanendranath thinking in terms of secret societies[24]—and the meteoric rise of Japan; the influence, in the early years of the new century, of Okakura and Nivedita; as well as of course the reaction to Curzon's arrogant ways.

The real story begins however round about 1902, with the formation of four groups, three in Calcutta and one in Midnapur. The Midnapur secret society has some claim to priority, being founded by Jnanendranath Basu (with the assistance of his brother Satyendranath and Hemchandra Kanungo) some months before the visits of Jatindranath Banerji and Aurobindo in the summer and autumn of 1902. A special feature here was the absence of the usual religious trappings, till Aurobindo introduced the vow on the sword and Gita in course of a second visit—and as we shall see, a secularist outlook characterised the leading Midnapur revolutionaries throughout our period.[25]

In the same year, Sarala Ghoshal started a gymnasium at her father's house (26 Ballygunj Circular Road), with training in sword and lathi-play given by 'professor' Murtaza. Gymnastic displays formed an important part of the Birastami and Pratapaditya festivals organised by this remarkable young lady in October 1902 and April 1903. In two letters—somewhat patronising in tone—written to Aswinicoomar Banerji (a relative by marriage) on 20 and 26 October 1902, Sarala Debi proclaimed her intention of passing "from speech

[23] "The protection of one's relatives must come before selfprotection, the defence of the country before the protection of relatives. Apart from faith in God, which is the same as love of humanity, patriotism is then the highest religion." Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay, *Dharmatattva anushilan*, 1888, Chapter 24 (translation mine).

[24] Hemchandra Kanungo, *op. cit.*, pp. 2-3.

[25] *Ibid*, Chapter I, II. Benoyjiban Ghosh, *Agniyuger astraguru hemchandra* (1952), Chapter IV.

to writing, and from writing to deeds", and urged the barrister to learn and teach others boxing, fencing and the use of firearms.[26] Foremost among the young men trained by Murtaza was Pulinbehari Das, leader of the Dacca Anushilan.[27] Contacted by Aurobindo's emissary Jatindranath Banerji in 1902,[28] Sarala Ghoshal along with her cousin Surendranath Tagore seems to have been a member of the 'inner circle' of revolutionaries till her departure from Calcutta upon her marriage with Rambhuj Dutta Chaudhuri of Lahore in 1905.[29] She was associated closely also with the Mymensingh Suhrid Samiti, maintaining some contact even from Lahore with its leaders Kedarnath Chakrabarti and Brojendralal Ganguli.[30]

Not very much is known about the origins of the third group—the Atmyonnati Samiti set up by some central Calcutta youths under Nibaran Bhattacharyya, Indranath Nandi, Bipinbihari Ganguli and Probhaschandra Dey with some contacts in the early days with Sibnath Sastri. Beginning as a broad and open organisation, many of its activists after 1902 coalesced gradually with Aurobindo's revolutionary group.[31]

But the group destined to greatest importance and fame was of course the Anushilan Samiti founded on 24 March 1902 by Satischandra Basu as a physical culture society with headquarters at 21 Madan Mitra Lane. Satischandra in search for influential patrons soon came into contact with Promotha Mitter, a middle-aged barrister who combined revolutionary dreams with strong mystical leanings, and the latter informed him a week afterwards that a man with similar ideas had

[26] Private Papers of A. C. Banerji.
[27] H. A. Salkeld's Report on the Anushilan Samiti, 10 December 1908, para 5—Home Political Progs Deposit, April 1909, n. 2.
[28] Sarala Debi, *op. cit.*, pp. 178-81.
[29] Statement by Abinash Bhattacharyya—Bhupendranath Dutta, *op. cit.*, Appendix, p. 191.
[30] R. Nathan's Note on the Suhrid Samiti, 14 December 1908—Home Political Progs Deposit, April 1909, n. 2.
[31] Bhupendranath Dutta, *op. cit.*, pp. 150-51, 201 (statement by Indranath Nandi).

come from Baroda and that the two should work together.[32] This was Jatindranath Banerji, who had joined the Gaekwad's army under an assumed name in order to get military training, and who had now been sent as an emissary by Aurobindo. He was followed some months later by Barindrakumar Ghosh, and Aurobindo himself paid two visits to Calcutta and Midnapur in the autumn of 1902.[33] Aurobindo incidentally had joined a Western Indian secret society headed by a Rajput nobleman "some time after he had already started secret revolutionary work in Bengal on his own account";[34] apart from imparting certain Maharashtrian touches to the early vows of the Bengal secret society, this connection seems to have had little impact on events here.[35]

The Anushilan Samiti as reconstituted in consultation with the Baroda leaders had Mitter as president, Aurobindo and Chittaranjan Das as vicepresidents, and Surendranath Tagore as treasurer. Nivedita presented the society with a rich collection of European revolutionary literature.[36] Financial support came from Mitter himself, as well as from a number of radical-minded young barristers—including Aswinicoomar Banerji, Surendranath Haldar, Jnanendranath Roy and Rajatnath Roy.[37] It must be added that there was little that was really conspiratorial or revolutionary about the Anushilan in this first phase of its existence. The akhara-cum-club run by Satischandra Basu in Madan Mitra Lane (shifted to 49 Cornwallis Street in 1905) was quite an open organisation which in the early days had the patronage of men as eminently respectable and moderate as Rashbehari

[32] Jibantara Haldar, *op. cit.*, pp. 4-6. Statement by Satischandra Basu in Bhupendranath Dutta, *op. cit.*, Appendix, pp. 179-81. For Mitter's mystic leanings, see Nalinikishore Guha, *op. cit.*, pp. 357-60.
[33] Hemchandra Kanungo, *op. cit.*, pp. 19-20.
[34] *Sri Aurobindo on Himself and on the Mother*, p. 14.
[35] Aurobindo states that "future action was not pursued under any directions by this Council"—*Ibid*, p. 43. The Maharashtrian influence is mentioned in Bhupendranath Dutta, *op. cit.*, p. 45.
[36] Bhupendranath Dutta, *op. cit.*, pp. 96, 100.
[37] *Ibid*, p. 101. Jibantara Haldar, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

Ghose and Saradacharan Mitra.[38] More serious in the revolutionary sense was the centre established by Jatindranath Banerji at 108 Upper Circular Road. Camouflaged as a riding club, this tried to provide military training to an inner circle of 'senior members' within the Anushilan, as well as to establish similar revolutionary centres in the districts.[39]

Progress in revolutionary organisation and work till 1905 was painfully slow. Hemchandra Kanungo describes the Calcutta centre in 1905 as consisting of "about a dozen leaders and deputy leaders, four or five at most of devoted followers, and a few semidisciples".[40] Despite earnest efforts by Jnanendranath and Satyendranath Basu and Hemchandra himself, the Midnapur secret society was in a similar position, while elsewhere there were only tiny groups—at Dacca, Bankura and Arabelia (north 24-Parganas) where there was the patriotic schoolmaster Surendranath Sen.[41] But this did not prevent a tremendous amount of tall talk and many exaggerated claims.[42] If Hemchandra is suspected of undue cynicism, we have also the statement of Barindrakumar Ghosh after arrest, describing how after two years spent in touring various districts of Bengal he had gone back to Baroda in 1904 an utterly disappointed man.[43] What Barindrakumar does not mention, of course, is his personal contribution to the debacle of the Upper Circular Road centre, which had gone to pieces soon after he had pushed out Jatindranath Banerji through a rather sordid intrigue.[44]

[38] Jibantara Haldar, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

[39] *Ibid*, pp. 7, 32.

[40] Hemchandra Kanungo, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

[41] *Ibid*, pp. 25-33. Bhupendranath Dutta, *op. cit.*, pp. 89-91.

[42] Thus Hemchandra frankly admits that while talking to the Calcutta leaders, he followed the example of other district emissaries and claimed a membership of four to five hundred in Midnapur. *Op. cit.*, p. 32.

[43] Statement dated 22 May 1908, cited in *Sedition Committee* (*Rowlatt*) *Report (1918)*, p. 14.

[44] Barindrakumar spread a scandal about Jatindranath involving an attractive young relative of the latter, and managed to persuade Aurobindo to expel the man whom later revolutionaries like Jatin Mukherji

A central revolutionary council—including Nivedita—which Aurobindo had set up during his 1902 visit soon ceased to exist.[45] Apart from recruitment and training, nothing concrete had been achieved or even seriously attempted in the way of revolutionary action before 1905; but for the Russo-Jap war and the partition, says Hemchandra, the whole secret society movement would probably have withered away in a few years.[46]

Thus it was the popular upsurge of 1905 which really saved these tiny revolutionary groups from the fate of the Sanjibani Sabha or the carbonari imitations of the 1870s. 'Akharas' now sprang up everywhere, inner circles of potential revolutionaries soon developed within many of the broadbased samitis conducting the open agitation, and the already existing groups underwent rapid expansion. The Calcutta Anushilan established numerous branches in the suburbs and neighbouring towns—Darjipara, Pataldanga, Kidderpore, Howrah, Salkia, Sibpur, Bally, Uttarpara, Serampore, Tarakeswar[47]—while after October 1906 the sister organisation founded in Dacca under Pulinbehari Das soon developed into a really formidable movement marked by iron discipline and centralised authority. In some districts—notably Midnapur and Dacca—the whole swadeshi movement was largely organised from behind the scenes by revolutionary societies; Bhupendranath Dutta's claim that this was true everywhere cannot, however, be accepted.[48] The expansion of the secret society movement was reflected in the first all-Bengal conference of revolutionaries in December 1906 with Mitter presiding, in which delegates came from Mymensingh, Dacca, Tripura, Jalpaiguri, Dinajpur,

and Jadugopal Mukherji always revered as the real founder of the movement in Bengal. The detailed account given by Hemchandra of this incident (pp. 38-39) is corroborated by Bhupendranath Dutta (pp. 128-29) and Jadugopal Mukherji (p. 199).

[45] *Sri Aurobindo on Himself and on the Mother*, p. 116.

[46] *Ibid*, p. 41.

[47] Jibantara Haldar, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

[48] Bhupendranath Dutta, *op. cit.*, p. 13. This was hardly the case in Barisal or Faridpur, for instance.

Nadia, Jessore, Burdwan and Midnapur.[49] Many of the revolutionary groups which became so famous later on may be traced back to this period—as for instance the Hooghly groups led by Amarendranath Chattopadhyay of Uttarpara, Hrishikesh Kanjilal of Serampore and Motilal Roy of Chandernagore; the south 24-Parganas party of Narendranath Bhattacharyya; the Nadia circle which produced the great Bagha Jatin; the Jessore-Khulna group; Purna Das's Madaripur group; the Barisal centre founded by Satischandra Mukherji (Swami Prajnananda); the North Bengal party spreading out from a nucleus constituted by the Pabna leaders Abinashchandra Chakrabarti and Annada Kaviraj; and the Mymensingh group of Hemendrakishore Acharyya Chaudhuri.[50]

If the popular movement stimulated militancy, however, it was also in a sense a distraction, from the point of view of 'revolution' conceived in terms of conspiracy leading up to armed action. Some of the early leaders of the secret societies became engrossed in public activity—thus Chittaranjan Das was converted to the creed of passive resistance by Pal,[51] Aswinicommar Banerji deserted the Anushilan Samiti to become a pioneer of trade unionism, and even Aurobindo for a time seems to have preferred the role of an extremist leader. Others who virtually dropped out included Surendranath Tagore after 1906, Sarala Debi following her departure for Lahore,[52] and Nivedita, whose absence from India in the crucial period from August 1907 to the summer of 1909 is a sufficient indication of the implausible nature of the romantic tales once current as to her being a kind of Jeanne d'Arc of the revolutionary movement.[53] Within the

[49] *Ibid*, pp. 168-72.

[50] Jadugopal Mukherji, *op. cit.*, pp. 662-67; Bhupendranath Dutta, *op. cit.*, pp. 118-19; Home Political Progs A, March 1910, n. 33-40.

[51] Bhupendranath Dutta, *op. cit.*, p. 160.

[52] Statement by Abinash Bhattacharyya—Bhupendranath Dutta, *op. cit.*, pp. 191, 196.

[53] The legend of Nivedita as virtual coleader with Aurobindo of the revolutionary movement was started by Liselle Raymond in her

original Calcutta Anushilan, too, Promotha Mitter and Satischandra Basu became involved more and more in physical culture and open swadeshi and philanthropic activity, direct revolutionary action being postponed to a far-distant future. The samiti under their guidance started a Workingmen's Institute with night classes for labourers, and worked together with Sir Daniel Hamilton in a scheme for cooperative land settlement in the Sunderbans.[54] Such activities were no doubt partly a cover for more serious things, but in any case the Calcutta Anushilan acquired sufficient respectability for the ban on it to be delayed till October 1909—nearly ten months after the other principal samitis had been suppressed.[55]

Physical culture and preparatory work alone could not satisfy the more militant elements in the Calcutta Anushilan, and from the first months of 1906 a distinct group emerged, remaining formally a part of Mitter's organisation but in practice working on independent lines. This was the group centering around Barindrakumar Ghosh, Bhupendranath Dutta, Abinash Bhattacharyya, Debabrata Basu and (a little later) Upendranath Banerji, with close links with the Midnapur secret society, and with the guidance from behind the scenes of Abinashchandra Chakrabarti, Sakharam

Nivedita, fille de l'Inde, assiduously propagated by Girijasankar Raychaudhuri, and revived recently by Bimanbihari Majumdar (*Militant Nationalism in India,* Chapters II, III). But Aurobindo has categorically stated that Nivedita was never a particularly close associate of his—"no occasion arose for consultations or decisions about the conduct of the revolutionary movement"; she was also never in any personal danger—"in spite of her political views she had friendly relations with high government officials and there was no question of her arrest" (*Sri Aurobindo on Himself and on the Mother,* p. 117). The latter statement is confirmed by the virtual absence of references to Nivedita in the home political files. The unimportance of Nivedita except in the early days was confirmed by Bhupendranath Dutta in interviews recorded in Haridas and Uma Mukherji, *Swadeshi andolan o banglar nabayug* (1961).

[54] Bhupendranath Dutta, *op. cit.,* pp. 21-23; Jibantara Haldar, *op. cit.,* pp. 19, 26.

[55] Home Political Progs A, October 1909, n. 178-81.

Ganesh Deuskar, Subodhchandra Mullick, Charuchandra Dutta and above all of Aurobindo, who however throughout "kept himself like a careful and valued general, out of sight of 'the enemy'".[56] To this circle belongs the credit for having been the first to take the leap from revolutionary theory to action, as well as—it must be added—the responsibility for making this pioneer attempt a strangely inept and amateurish affair.

From the first months of the swadeshi upsurge, Barindrakumar's group had started bringing out illegal revolutionary leaflets—*No Compromise, Raja ke* and the *Sonar bangla* series.[57] At the beginning of 1906, a meeting of the group attended by Aurobindo and Charuchandra Dutta decided to bring out a revolutionary weekly and to start 'action'.[58] The weekly of course was the *Yugantar,* published from Kanai Dhar Lane which became the new revolutionary headquarters. The sinews of war came through the Chhatra Bhandar founded by Indranath Nandi and Nikhileswar Roy Mullick—ostensibly a swadeshi stores with numerous mufassil branches, in reality a cover for the supply of funds, revolutionary literature, and arms and ammunition.[59] The first

[56] Fraser to Minto, 19 May 1908—Minto Papers, M982. For the formation and composition of this group, cf. Hemchandra Kanungo, *op. cit.*, Chapter VII; Bhupendranath Dutta, *op. cit.*, pp. 24-26, 131-35; Jadugopal Mukherji, *op. cit.*, p. 276.

[57] The authorship of the *Sonar bangla* leaflets has been much disputed. In Intelligence Branch File No. 477/07, these are attributed to Brahmabandhab Upadhyay—Haridas and Uma Mukherji, *Upadhyay brahmobandhab o bharatiya jatiyatabad,* Appendix IX. But Bhupendranath Dutta has claimed categorically that such literature originated from his group, and he also states that one among the *Sonar Bangla* series was printed at Upadhyay's press, thus perhaps explaining the police misconception—*op. cit.*, pp. 126, 139.

[58] Hemchandra Kanungo, *op. cit.*, p. 97. The 'Ga-babu' of the text is identified as Charuchandra Dutta in Benoyjiban Ghosh's biography of Hemchandra; 'Ka-babu' obviously stands for Aurobindo.

[59] For the Chhatra Bhandar, see Hemchandra Kanungo, *op. cit.*, p. 77; Justice Beachcroft's comments in Bijoy Krishna Bose, *The Young Bomb Case* (1910), p. 165; and Home Political Progs A, March 1910, n. 33-40.

action undertaken was the trailing of Fuller (with a home-made 'bomb' of doubtful efficacy) from Shillong through Barisal and Rangpur to Naihati by Barindrakumar, Hemchandra and Prafulla Chaki. Money had been advanced by several highly respectable politicians for the head of Fuller after the Barisal conference,[60] but the chase ended with the would-be assassins looking foolish as the train carrying the ex-lieutenant-governor steamed out of Naihati on an unexpected route.[61] As funds had run short in the meantime, Aurobindo ordered the first 'swadeshi dacoity'—an abortive bid to raid the house of a rich widow at Mahipur in Rangpur district (August 1906) which failed because the two bands (led by Hemchandra and Narendranath Gossain) missed each other in the dark.[62]

The experience of such quasicomic ventures led Hemchandra Kanungo to do some serious rethinking, and this resulted in his leaving for Europe in August 1906 to obtain proper training from the professional revolutionaries of the West. This was a personal decision, and the money came from the sale of part of his own property. In Paris Hemchandra got in touch with S. R. Rana, Shyamji Krishnavarma and Madame Cama, met some genuine anarchists but found little to learn from them, and eventually was able to contact the Russian socialist underground and persuade them to give him and two other Indians (Mirza Abbas and P. M. Bapat) training in the making of bombs as well as in

[60] Including—some say—no less a person than Surendranath Banerji, who is said to have "blessed" Barin's bomb at Simultala—Sukumar Mitra, "Aurobindo Ackroyd Ghosh", *Mashik Basumati*, Falgun 1358 (1952). Surendranath's own version is that he persuaded the revolutionaries to drop the scheme and paid them their return fare—*Nation in Making*, pp. 217-18.

[61] Hemchandra Kanungo gives a synical but highly entertaining and detailed account of the whole affair—Chapters IX, XI.

[62] *Ibid*, Chapter X. Barindrakumar on this occasion stayed behind in Rangpur town, perhaps taking a leaf out of his elder brother's book. Cf. also *Sedition Committee Report*, p. 23.

politics.[63] Such socialist—quite possibly bolshevik[64]—contacts must have immeasurably strengthened Hemchandra's militantly rationalist and antireligious cast of mind; he also acquired an interest in Marxism which he was to retain all his life.[65]

In January 1908, Hemchandra returned with his luggage full of revolutionary materials—including a 174-page bomb manual and a 150-page treatise on revolutionary organisation[66]—and with a plan to set up an all-India network which would supply students for a secret Paris school where his socialist friends had promised to give free instruction.[67] Aurobindo and his brother, however, were not interested in such long-term schemes, though they were of course willing enough to make use of Hemchandra's bomb-making expertise. Barindrakumar in the meantime had established a combined religious school and bomb factory at a garden house in

[63] *Ibid*, Chapter XII; Benoyjiban Ghosh, *op. cit.*, Chapter IX. Hemchandra recalls that his foreign mentors advised him to concentrate on political training and the learning of underground techniques; bomb-manufacture was only a small part of revolutionary work, they told him.

[64] Hemchandra never learnt the real name of his principal Russian mentor, who went under the alias of 'Ph.D'—but he was told that the latter had been an orientalist of some distinction. As for the precise political affiliation, the choice seems to lie between the socialist-revolutionaries and the bolsheviks—and the latter, it may be remembered, had organised effective 'fighting-squads' during the closing phase of the 1905 revolution despite the charge of "narodnism" levelled against them by the mensheviks supported by Trotsky (Isaac Deutscher, *The Prophet Armed*, p. 179). Hemchandra's later Marxist leanings indicate that his contacts were probably bolsheviks.

[65] Sri Sambhu Saha, who learnt photography, painting and carpentry from Hemchandra in Midnapur town in the early 1920s, told me in an interview that the old revolutionary also tried to teach his young pupils Marx's *Capital*, and had named his grandson Lenin. Cf. also Benoyjiban Ghosh, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

[66] As well as masses of Russian revolutionary literature and photographs of leaders. This list is given in an unpublished second draft of Hemchandra's book, from which Benoyjiban Ghosh quotes—*op. cit.*, p. 123.

[67] Hemchandra Kanungo, *op. cit.*, pp. 217-18.

Muraripukur (Maniktala)—a most injudicious choice of site, Hemchandra points out, as it was a lonely suburb where newcomers were sure to be noticed. Ullaskar Dutta, a Presidency College chemistry student, was in charge of bomb-manufacture, while Upendranath Banerji supervised the religious exercises. Hemchandra, repelled alike by religiosity and Barindrakumar's arrogant ways, tried for a short while to set up an independent group with the financial assistance of Brojendrakishore Roychaudhuri and the raja of Narajole, but eventually rejoined Aurobindo's party, establishing a bomb-training school in a crowded part of the city.[68]

Till the winter of 1907-8, the police had had little inkling as to what was brewing in Bengal. Some entirely innocent railway coolies had been convicted for the attempt to blow up Fraser's train near Narayangarh on 6 December 1907—only much later was this recognised to have been the "first overt act of the secret society".[69] In the first swadeshi dacoity case (at Chingripota railway station, south of Calcutta) about the same time, the accused (including Narendranath Bhattacharyya) were acquitted by the magistrate who refused to believe that such bhadralok youths could be robbers.[70] That the Muraripukur group was exposed so soon afterwards was due largely to its leadership, and particularly perhaps to the carelessness of Barindrakumar Ghosh.[71] The bomb attack on Tardivelle, the mayor of Chandernagore (11 April 1908), probably led to the first serious CID investigation. Hemchandra alleges that this action was solely due to a mystic "message" received by

[68] *Ibid*, Chapter XIV; Benoyjiban Ghosh, Chapter X. The point about Barindrakumar's arrogance is confirmed by several other revolutionaries—e.g. Indranath Nandi in Bhupendranath Dutta, p. 207; and Upendranath Banerji—*Nirbashiter atmakatha*, p. 26.

[69] Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal to the Viceroy (Telegram), 7 December 1907—Minto Papers, M981. Home Political Progs A. May 1908, n. 104. Hemchandra Kanungo states that the dynamite had been placed by Bibhuti Sarkar acting under instructions from Barindrakumar Ghosh—*op. cit.*, p. 228.

[70] Home Political Progs A, March 1910, n. 34.

[71] Hemchandra Kanungo, *op. cit.*, pp. 230, 268-70.

Aurobindo, already deeply immersed in yogic practices—and one is tempted to believe this charge, since the whole attempt appears so utterly irrational.[72] Kingsford was of course a much more obvious and natural target. Hemchandra displayed the value of his Paris training in the bomb sent to Kingsford hidden in a book—which the chief presidency magistrate placed unopened on his library shelf.[73] This was followed by the sending of Kshudiram Basu and Prafulla Chaki—both trained by Hemchandra—to Muzaffarpur, and the tragic events of 30 April 1908. Within 36 hours of the Kennedy murders practically the whole group had been rounded up. Barindrakumar, blithely ignoring to the last Aurobindo's advice to take some elementary precautions,[74] failed to warn the others or to remove the incriminating material from the Muraripukur gardens. When the police came in the early morning of 2 May, "after some of the explosives had been discovered, Barindra took an active part in pointing out where the rest were concealed".[75] He followed up this remarkable performance by a full confession on 4 May,[76] which suppressed only the role of Aurobindo and the names of the financial helpers of the revolutionaries. Barindarkumar even mentioned the names of a few who had not been arrested till then—among them Naren Gossain, the archtraitor of patriotic legend. Statements were made by most of the others in the group with the active encouragement of Barindrakumar, who argued that the publicity resulting from such confessions would serve the cause of revolutionary propaganda. The two major exceptions[77] were

[72] *Ibid*, pp. 238-39. Tardivelle had been trying to enforce an arms act in Chandernagore—but an attack on him would obviously attract even greater police attention towards the French enclave. The mayor was also not a universally hated figure, unlike Kingsford.

[73] *Ibid*, pp. 262-64.

[74] *Ibid*, p. 270.

[75] Government of Bengal to Government of India (Home), No. 3 PT, 16 May 1908, para 4—Home Political Progs A, May 1908, n. 104.

[76] *Bengalee*, 6 May 1908.

[77] Hemchandra Kanungo, *op. cit.* pp. 283, 311. Hemchandra of course may be suspected of personal spite against Barindrakumar, but his

Hemchandra and Aurobindo. Where Gossain went beyond the others was in involving Aurobindo, too.[78]

Fraser expressed to Minto his sense of satisfaction with the "very well-planned raid in Calcutta" which had nipped in the bud the plan "to instruct men in the manufacture and use of explosives and organise schools and factories all over India. . ."[79] Events soon proved this official satisfaction to be premature. Inside Alipore jail itself, the daring assassination of Narendranath Gossain by Satyendranath Basu and Kanailal Dutta (31 August 1908) aroused the admiration of the French socialist daily *l'Humanite*.[80] The attack on Fraser (7 November 1908), the murder of sub-inspector Nandalal Banerji (9 November 1908), of public prosecutor Asutosh Biswas (10 February 1909) and of Shamsul Alam (24 January 1910),[81] and the attempt to win over the 10th Jat Regiment[82]—revealed the existence of several active groups in and around Calcutta, soon to be knit together by Jatindranath Mukherji. And meanwhile in East Bengal the Dacca Anushilan was moving into action, revealing in its first major venture—the Barrah dacoity of 2 June 1908—an organisational ability and command over resources and men quite beyond the powers of the Auro-

account is fully confirmed by Jadugopal Mukherji, *op. cit.*, p. 328, and Indranath Nandi in Bhupendranath Dutta, *op. cit.*, p. 207.

78 The assassination of Narendranath Gossain prevented the use of his statements at the trial (since he had not been cross-examined), and thus saved Aurobindo—Hemchandra Kanungo, *op. cit.*, p. 327. A direct result of this incident was the clause in the Criminal Law Amendment Act (XIV of 1908, passed on 11 December 1908) enabling the use of evidence taken in inferior courts by the high court "if the witness be dead or cannot be produced, and if the high court has reason to believe that his death or absence has been caused in the interests of the accused", notwithstanding the provisions of the Indian Evidence Act of 1872—Home Political Progs A, February 1909, n. 113-36.

79 Fraser to Minto, 7 and 19 May 1908—Minto Papers, M982.

80 Bhupendranath Dutta, *op. cit.*, p. 58.

81 Statement of Political Offences Involving Breaches of Peace—Home Political Progs Deposit, April 1911, n. 7.

82 Home Political Progs A, March 1910, n. 33.

bindo group.[83] The saga of revolutionary terrorism had only just begun.

III. The Inner Life of the Secret Societies

For a generation or more, revolutionary terrorism cast a spell over many of the sincerest and most talented young men (and women too, in the late 1920s and '30s) of Bengal. This makes a study of the inner life of the secret societies—their methods of training, the intellectual make-up of the revolutionaries, and the debates over ideals, ideologies and tactics—a matter of considerable historical importance. The revolutionary, it must be remembered, was not a uniform or changeless type.

From the very beginning, the societies tried to combine physical culture with moral and intellectual training. The Calcutta Anushilan is said to have had a library of 4000 books,[84] a list of 230 titles in the collection of the Mymensingh Suhrid Samiti has been preserved in the home political files,[85] and these and other samitis had a system of regular classes. The intellectual influences were extremely diverse. Dutt, Naoroji and Digby, as filtered through Sakharam Ganesh Deuskar, provided the basic economic doctrine of British exploitation and drain of wealth. Hindu resurgence was of course a major inspiration, with its principal sources in Rajnarayan, Bankimchandra and Vivekananda; tantric rituals influenced initiation ceremonies, while the Gita provided solace for the more sophisticated. Bhupendranath Dutta reminds us, however, that a surprisingly large number of the early revolutionaries had been influenced by

[83] A vivid account of this dacoity is given in Nalinikishore Guha, *op. cit.*, pp. 102-7.

[84] Jibantara Haldar, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

[85] The list includes titles like *Condemned as a Nihilist, Self-Help, Free Trade and Protection, Lives of Cromwell, Washington and Napoleon, Life and Teachings of Vivekananda* and two books by him, a book on Ramkrishna, *Nabya Japan, Palashir yuddha,* and *Maharaj nandakumar charit.* D.O. No. 936, J. R. Blackwood to R. Nathan, 28 January 1909—Home Political Deposit, April 1909, n. 2.

Brahmoism—the very name Yugantar, he states, came from a novel by Sibnath Sastri.[86] Jogendranath Vidyabhusan's numerous biographies of Mazzini, Garibaldi, and other patriotic leaders, both Indian and foreign, seem to have been almost as important as *Anandamath* itself; more direct contacts with revolutionary movements abroad were provided by the life of Mazzini, Irish nationalist literature and Kropotkin's works presented by Nivedita.[87] Interest in radical movements and 'revolutions', no less sincere for being so beautifully eclectic and vague, led some early recruits further afield—thus Deuskar asked his Anushilan Samiti pupils to try to obtain literature on socialism from the Imperial Library, and despite the librarian's discouragement, Bhupendranath was able to get from there a book by Hyndman.[88]

The influence of orthodox or revivalist Hinduism was real enough—and yet the conventional image of the Bengal revolutionary as advancing with a bomb in one hand and the Gita in the other seems more than a little overdrawn. Even the influence of Vivekananda has probably been exaggerated by later writers. Of the first groups, the Midnapur society of Jnanendranath Basu started on an utterly secular basis. Indranath Nandi has explicitly stated that the early Atmyonnati had been entirely free from Vivekananda's influence,[89] while Aurobindo himself in his autobiographical account played down the alleged role of the Swamiji's

[86] Bhupendranath Dutta, *op. cit.*, pp. 25, 89-91. The Brahmos or near-Brahmos included Jnanendranath and Satyendranath Basu of Midnapur, Dhirendranath Chaudhuri of Cuttack, Surendranath Sen of Arbelia and Kishoregunj, Surendranath Tagore and Sarala Debi, Ullaskar Dutta—and Bhupendranath himself. Debabrata Basu and Aurobindo and his brother also came from Brahmo families—though in course of time they came to repudiate that distinction with a vengeance.

[87] *Ibid*, p. 96. On intellectual influences and training, cf. also Jibantara Haldar, *op. cit.*, pp. 13-14, and Jadugopal Mukherji, *op. cit.*, pp. 271-75.

[88] Bhupendranath Dutta, *op. cit.*, pp. 135-36. Jadugopal Mukherji also recalls socialistic lectures by Prabhatkusum Raychaudhuri and Apurbakumar Ghosh—p. 271.

[89] Bhupendranath Dutta, *op. cit.*, p. 201.

ideas in shaping his revolutionary activities.[90] Only with Satischandra Basu was the influence of Vivekananda and Nivedita an important factor from the beginning.[91] But for the vow on the Gita during initiation, there was in fact little of religion in the revolutionary society as founded by Aurobindo and his emissaries in 1902[92]—and Aurobindo states that he started yoga regularly only from about 1904.[93]

Hemchandra Kanungo names Debabrata Basu (Swami Prajnananda of later times) as the man who first convinced Barindrakumar and Aurobindo of the need to give revolutionary politics a spiritual colour, and he categorically states that this attempt to gain recruits and raise their morale through religious forms was a direct consequence of the insignificant results achieved by militant propaganda and secret society work down to 1905.[94] As so often with Hemchandra, what seems at first sight an unduly cynical interpretation is corroborated by quite independent sources. In his statement after arrest, Barindrakumar recalled that his first two years' work had been extremely frustrating, and that in 1905 he "returned to Bengal convinced that a purely political propaganda would not do for the country, and that people must be trained up spiritually to face dangers". Upendranath Banerji similarly stated his conviction that the "people of India would not be made to do any work except through religion".[95] Whatever the reason might have been, there can be no doubt that religious influence among the revolutionaries—and particularly in Aurobindo's group—reached its apex between 1905 and 1908. Nivedita's *Kali, the Mother* (1905) offered a startling reinterpretation

[90] "He (Aurobindo) had only heard casually of Vivekananda's intense patriotic feelings which inspired Sister Nivedita"—*Sri Aurobindo on Himself and on the Mother*, p. 32.

[91] Statement by Satischandra Basu—Bhupendranath Dutta, *op. cit.*, p. 179.

[92] Hemchandra Kanungo, *op. cit.*, p. 58.

[93] *Sri Aurobindo on Himself and on the Mother*, p. 34.

[94] Hemchandra Kanungo, *op. cit.*, pp. 40, 58-59.

[95] *Sedition Committee (Rowlatt) Report*, pp. 14, 15.

of the goddess as incarnated in the sword.[96] Aurobindo's *Bhawani mandir* of the same year sketched out a plan for the cultivation of "Sakti" through a temple to "Bhawani, the Mother of Strength, the Mother of India" in a far-away place, which would be served by a new order of brahmacharins for whom "adoration will be dead and ineffective unless transmitted into Karma".[97] An attempt was actually made to set up such a religious-cum-political training centre at Chandapathor near the Bankura-Midnapur border on land given by Digambar Nanda, the patriotic zamindar of Contai.[98] At the Maniktala gardens, spiritual exercises—based now on the Gita rather than the Chandi—were given almost as much importance as bomb-manufacture; what Hemchandra caustically describes as a "competition in realisation" raged among the members of the secret society[99], and the metamorphosis of Aurobindo from revolutionary leader into mystic guru had clearly begun. The means to the end of political emancipation, as Hemchandra acutely notes, was turning into an end in itself.[100]

Yet a dissident, secular and even antireligious trend was by no means absent among the revolutionaries even in those years. Bhupendranath Dutta refused to take a vow on Hindu shastras alone.[101] An early recruit, Khagendrachandra Das, we are told, once complained to Debabrata Basu that the Hindu rituals were alienating possible Muslim and Brahmo sympathisers.[102] But the opposition to religiosity found its

[96] For a discussion of the revolutionary significance of this work, see Bimanbihari Majumdar, *Militant Nationalism in India*, pp. 55-57.

[97] A description of this plan to organise "political sanyasis" under the guise of Bhawani Mandir is given in HFM(B) No. 53—Quotations from and Discussion on Bhawani Mandir.

[93] Hemchandra Kanungo, *op. cit.*, pp. 103-4. Benoyjiban Ghosh, *op. cit.*, pp. 52-54. Home Political Progs A, March 1910, n. 34—file on Digambar Nanda.

[99] Hemchandra Kanungo, *op. cit.*, p. 247.

[100] *Ibid*, p. 244.

[101] An assortment of the sacred books of different religions had to be provided for him eventually. Bhupendranath Dutta, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

[102] *Ibid*, p. 104.

main strength, of course, in Hemchandra Kanungo and his comrades and associates of Midnapur, as well as among some of the young men trained by him in the early months of 1908. The sceptics included Satyendranath Basu, Kanailal Dutta, Kshudiram Basu—three of the first four martyrs, it is interesting to note—and Sushilkumar Sen.[103] In Alipore jail, Kanailal once threw a copy of the Gita into a pond, and Bejoy Bhattacharyya sat on the shoulders of a meditator on the absolute.[104] That all this is not hindsight of Hemchandra's old age is proved by Upendranath Banerji's account of two groups among the prisoners, the religious led by Debabrata Basu, and the irrepressible band of atheists under Kanungo.[105] Upendranath was in charge of religious training at Muraripukur; all the more valuable therefore is his magnificent tribute to Hemchandra Kanungo who with his unequalled courage, fortitude and sense of humour proved a tower of strength for all of them in the harsh Andaman days.[106] Hemchandra incidentally was described by justice Beachcroft as "the most sinister figure in this conspiracy".[107]

After 1908, says the Rowlatt Report, the importance of religion declined—the secret societies "gradually dropped the religious ideas underlying the *Bhawani mandir* pamphlet (with the exception of the formalities of oaths and vows) and developed the terroristic side. . ."[108] This shift was naturally most evident in revolutionary literature smuggled in from abroad. The six pamphlets preserved in a home political file of April 1911 are overwhelmingly secular in tone; in place of Hindu revivalism, we have rather the invocation of the martyrs of 1857—"Whisper, then, unto us by what

103 Hemchandra Kanungo, *op. cit.*, pp. 242, 253, 260-61. Cf. also Bhupendranath Dutta, pp. 89-91. Hemchandra makes the further allegation that the unspiritual types were usually assigned the riskier kind of jobs by the leaders striving for 'realisation'—*op. cit.*, pp. 242, 261.

104 Hemchandra Kanungo, *op. cit.*, p. 317.

105 Upendranath Banerji, *Nirbashiter atmakatha* (7th edition, 1960), p. 61.

106 *Ibid*, p. 83.

107 Bejoykrishna Bose, *The Alipore Bomb Case*, p. 236.

108 *Sedition Committee (Rowlatt) Report*, p. 67.

magic, you caught the secret of union. How the Firinghee rule was shattered to pieces and the swadeshi thrones were set up by the common consent of Hindus and Mahomedans. . ."[109] The same change is recalled in the memoirs of Dacca Anushilan member Satis Pakrashi,[110] and even Nalinikishore Guha, who has devoted a whole chapter to an attempted refutation of Hemchandra Kanungo's irreligious slanders,[111] mentions in another context debates about the role of religion within revolutionary circles. The more religious-minded, he says, often tended in the end to drift away from active politics.[112]

A second major debate within the secret societies concerned the methods of achieving freedom. Subjectively, as leaflets like *Raja ke* or the early ones in the *Sonar bangla* series indicate,[113] the members of the secret societies were not 'terrorists' but men who had convinced themselves that a kind of national uprising against foreign rule was just around the corner, needing merely to be prodded into movement by energetic action by the elite. The mistake, as Hemchandra pointed out later on, lay in confounding an undoubtedly widespread anti-British sentiment with readiness to plunge into revolutionary action. While there was no lack of armchair patriots, of highly respectable men who would have been extremely glad to learn that someone had managed to thrash an Anglo-Indian or to finish off an unpopular official like Fuller or Kingsford, in practice the number of revolutionary recruits or even of financial supporters remained a handful.[114] The contradiction between subjective desires and objective conditions almost inevitably pushed the movement into the path of political dacoity and individual violence. "Of course we never believed that this sort of murders would bring political independence", confessed Barindrakumar

[109] *Oh, Martyrs*—p. 2. Home Political Progs Deposit, April 1911, n. 7.
[110] Satis Pakrashi, *Agnidiner katha* (1947), p. 102.
[111] Nalinikishore Guha, *op. cit.*, p. 219.
[112] *Ibid*, p. 68.
[113] Cf. above. Chapter VI, p. 273.
[114] Hemchandra Kanungo, *op. cit.*, p. 74.

Ghosh after arrest; but "we believed that this will teach the people to dare and die"[115] an echo, probably unconscious, of the anarchist theory of "propaganda by deed".

Yet the shift to terroristic methods had its critics within the movement. Jadugopal Mukherji claims that he was always opposed to Barindrakumar's adventurist ways; revolution, he had urged, must have four wings—students, peasants, workers and soldiers—and required years of patient preparation.[116] It may be unwise to lay too much emphasis on reminiscences written as late as 1956, but Jadugopal's statement that Sasibhusan Raychaudhuri of Sodepur, one of the earliest members of the Calcutta Anushilan, was a particularly outspoken advocate of mass work in contrast to individual terror,[117] is confirmed by other sources. Raychaudhuri started night-schools among villagers in Sodepur, and later became the chief organiser of the Workingmen's Institute run by the Anushilan in Calcutta.[118] Bhupendranath Dutta has left an interesting account of the views of Abinashchandra Chakrabarti, the munsiff from Pabna who was a major financial support of Aurobindo's group. It seems that Abinashchandra was always somewhat sceptical about the value of 'akharas' of educated young men; he wanted the movement to be oriented towards the peasantry, and liked to cite the example of the Pabna raiyats' movement of the 1870s.[119] In 1909, a police report stated that sharp differences had arisen in East Bengal between the Suhrid Samiti on the one hand and the Dacca Anushilan and Brati leaders on the other. The latter felt "that any act which will, in their opinion, terrorise or handicap the working of the British government is so much gained", and wanted to press ahead with individual assassination and political dacoity. The Suhrid, however, "would for the mo-

[115] *Bengalee*, 6 May 1908.
[116] Jadugopal Mukherji, *op. cit.*, pp. 26-27, 277-85.
[117] *Ibid*, pp. 196, 206.
[118] Jibantara Haldar, *op. cit.*, p. 19.
[119] Bhupendranath adds that in 1936, shortly before his death, Abinashchandra was planning to contact Bankim Mukherji, the communist leader. Bhupendranath Dutta, *op. cit.*, pp. 131-35.

ment drop assassination and terrorism, educate the rural population and disseminate their views far more widely than has been done as yet"—weapons in the meantime should be quietly collected and stored against the day of a really nation-wide uprising.[120]

As mass contact in practice remained beyond the reach of all revolutionaries, it was this narrower debate over tactics—immediate action vs quiet and systematic preparatory work—which in course of time became a kind of dividing-line within the secret societies. Broadly speaking, the Yugantar groups, led by Jatindranath Mukherji and later by Jadugopal, tried to conserve their resources and establish international contacts, leading up to the famous Indo-German conspiracy of the war years; the Dacca Anushilan, on the other hand, preferred to stick to the pattern of dacoity and individual terror. Activities of both kinds, of course, remained well within the orbit of elite action; the dream of mass revolution had given place to schemes for military coup d'etat backed by foreign powers.[121]

What all revolutionaries shared in common, of course, was a burning passion for national independence as a goal which could and must be attained in the near future. But as regards the exact contours of free India, there was scope for considerable vagueness. Both Bhupendranath and Hemchandra state that questions on the subject were discouraged by the secret society leaders.[122] Debabrata Basu did tell the former, however, that a kind of Bundestaat might be set up, with some princely and some republican units.[123] A similar

[120] Home Political Progs Deposit, August 1909, n. 26—Report on 'National Volunteers' in Eastern Bengal and Assam up to the end of April 1909, p. 7.

[121] Thus despite alleged plans for revolution based on peasants and workers, in practice, Jadugopal concentrated on getting arms from abroad—he sent his brothers Khirodgopal to Burma and Dhanagopal to Japan and America in 1908 for the purpose. Jadugopal Mukherji, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

[122] Bhupendranath Dutta, *op. cit.*, pp. 28-29; Hemchandra Kanungo, *op. cit.*, p. 101.

[123] Bhupendranath Dutta, *loc. cit.*

plan was sketched out in greater detail in an Abhinava Bharat pamphlet entitled *Choose, Oh Indian Princes.* This emphasised the need for representative assemblies in all units, but otherwise promised the princes a status "just like the position of German princes"—provided of course they cooperated with or at least did not hinder the process of liberation. The territories of "traitor princes" would be taken away, but only to be distributed among the patriotic rulers, and the pamphlet contains the rather interesting appeal: "Advance then, O Princes of India, boldly and bravely—there is nothing but your chains to lose!"[124] The political ideal was thus by no means consistently democratic; what was more serious, the early leaders made no attempt to spell out what independence would bring to the people in concrete bread-and-butter terms. As Bhupendranath Dutta later complained, the basic limitation lay in failing to realise the link between political and other kinds of freedom, social, economic, religious and intellectual.[125]

Taken as a whole, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that revolutionary terrorism was a heroic failure. The British were certainly badly frightened, as shown by the intensity of repression, but their administration was never in any real danger of collapsing. The bombs took far greater toll of Indian subordinates than of their white overlords, and yet the rulers never lacked 'native' civil servants, clerks, policemen and soldiers. Even during the first world war, with the country largely denuded of British troops, the grandiose plans for armed insurrection based on foreign aid and subversion of the Indian regiments were all still-born. Rashbehari Basu had to flee to Japan, and Bagha Jatin died on the banks of the Buribalam, hunted down by the police with the active help of the local villagers. The incident seems symbolic—lacking a peasant base, the revolutionaries could never rise to the level of real guerilla action or set up 'liberated areas' in the countryside. As for the average edu-

[124] A copy of this pamphlet is enclosed in Home Political Progs Deposit, April 1911, n. 7.

[125] Bhupendranath Dutta, *op. cit.*, pp. 35-43.

cated Indian, he derived vicarious satisfaction from the deeds of the heroes, and watched and admired—from a distance.

Yet if, despite all its limitations, revolutionary terrorism remains a memorable and important part of our national heritage, this is not solely because of the innumerable acts of heroism which it called forth from so many people, known and unknown; even more impressive perhaps is the search for ever new paths to freedom which distinguished its best representatives. Hemchandra Kanungo's call for relentless selfcriticism, learning from past mistakes, and quest for new ideals[126] required an enormous amount of courage; it has always been only too easy and perhaps natural in persecuted revolutionary movements to confound heretics with renegades. But the challenge was taken up, with the result that many 'terrorists'—particularly of the Yugantar groups—eventually found their way back into the mainstream of a national movement which was slowly but surely breaking with its mendicant illusions, accepting purna swaraj as its goal and transcending with Gandhi the barriers of bhadralok society. Many others followed the path first traced out on the intellectual level by Hemchandra Kanungo, and from Bhupendranath Dutta and M. N. Roy through Ajoy Ghosh[127] to the 'communist consolidation'[128] in the Andaman and other jails, ex-terrorists have strengthened the ranks of the left in India.

[126] Hemchandra Kanungo, *op. cit.*, p. v.

[127] Close associate of Bhagat Singh in the Hindustan Socialist Republican Association; general secretary, from 1951 to his death in 1962, of the Communist Party of India.

[128] The formation in the mid-1930s after intensive debates of communist groups among the detenus in Andaman and other jails.

Chapter Ten

CONCLUSION

The swadeshi movement of 1903-8 leaves on the observer of the present day two major impressions, contradictory and yet perhaps equally valid—a sense of richness and promise, of national energies bursting out in diverse streams of political activity, intellectual debate and cultural efflorescence; and a feeling of disappointment, even anticlimax, at the blighting of so many hopes.

It seems wisest to begin with the qualifications, as the researcher so often is tempted to magnify the importance of his own period. In point of individual heroism, these five years cannot stand comparison with the annals of revolutionary terrorism which had just begun in 1908. In mass participation, the achievements of the age fell far short of what would be attained later by our national movement in 1919-22, 1930-34, 1942 and 1945-46. On the score of originality, too, excessive claims must be abjured. The partition was opposed at first mainly as an alleged threat to certain elite grievances and a peculiarly gross addition to the already familiar tale of white racial arrogance; the boycott found its rationale in arguments supplied by moderate economists; and there was nothing particularly novel about the methods of constitutional 'agitation' and bargaining with the rulers which engrossed all politicians down to 1905 and quite a number throughout the period. Boycott, swadeshi, national education, the use of imaginative techniques to draw in the masses—occasional anticipations of even these can be found in earlier periods, particularly perhaps in the Bengal of the 1860s and '70s.

What remains remarkable about the swadeshi age is the

simultaneous presence in it, at least in germ, of so many of the tendencies and forces which went on shaping the life of our people till 1947 and even beyond. The growing conviction that British and Indian interests were irreconcilable, and hence that what was needed was the clean surgical break of swaraj, not partial reforms within the system; the associated confidence in India's potentialities, making of swaraj a realisable goal; the first dim awareness of worldwide anti-imperialist—and socialist—currents; efforts to promote the autonomous development of national life through swadeshi industries and crafts, national schools and village societies; boycott of foreign goods, generalised step by step into a programme of passive resistance, anticipating in virtually every detail (minus the nonviolence dogma) the techniques of Gandhian noncooperation; volunteer organisations or samitis; labour unions with an element of political guidance: the use of the religious medium to overcome the barrier between the elite and the masses, and its unforeseen consequences in the sharpening of Hindu-Muslim tensions; the cult of the bomb—in all this and much more, the years 1903-8 were a microcosm revealing the rich diversity and the multifarious facets of Indian nationalism.

Cutting across the political lines of division raged the great ideological debate, so very relevant to us even today, which I have tried to analyse in terms of the not-very-satisfactory and probably oversimple categories of revivalism and modernism, but which may be redefined perhaps as our intelligentsia's search for identity amidst a maze of possible alternative loyalties—Bengali, Hindu (or Muslim), Indian. The political leadership of the '70s and '80s had achieved a kind of vision of a united India, secular and modernist in content. But the unity had been fragile and superficial, confined as it was to an Anglicised upper-class elite which in its behaviour seemed at times to be on the point of realising Macaulay's dream. With the spread of political consciousness and the growing disenchantment with British promises, deeper traditionalist, religious and regional loyalties were bound to assert themselves, and nationalism had to try to

anchor itself with such trends if it was ever to break out of its elitist shell.

Many in the swadeshi age thought for a time that a basis for a more purely indigenous and popular nationalism could be found in Hinduism—and so we had the curious but by no means unique[1] phenomenon of intellectuals utterly westernised in outlook and way of life striving by a tour de force to turn overnight into orthodox Hindus, imparting to age-old rituals and symbols a political content which was in fact quite untraditional. Thus Pal urged Bengalis to worship Durga "not merely as a pauranic deity or as a mythological figure, but as the visible representation of the eternal spirit of their race",[2] and the *Bande Mataram* discovered in caste rules the germs of a "purified" conception of democracy and even of socialism.[3] Such incongruous combinations probably left most genuinely orthodox people cold, and the riots of 1906-7 stimulated a process of rethinking at least in the minds of a few—most notably in Rabindranath. By 1908 there were some signs of a return to modernistic ideals, but on a higher plane which recognised more fully than ever before the true complexity of India's problems, the paramount need for overcoming the alienation of the intellectual elite and bringing about genuine and stable Hindu-Muslim fraternity. Tagore's great essays of 1907-8 have lost none of their freshness or relevance with time, and his *Gora* remains the classic symbol of modern India's quest for identity.

More fruitful perhaps than the Hindu note was the identification with basic regional and linguistic loyalties. There were problems here too—the emphasis on Bengali language, culture and traditions did occasionally assume a

1 A similar combination of radical political ideals with pseudotraditional religious propaganda may be seen in the pan-Islamism of Jamal-al-Din al-Afghani.

2 "The Durga Puja", *New India*, 24 September 1906—reprinted in Pal, *Swadeshi and swaraj*, p. 105.

3 "Caste and Democracy"—Editorial in *Bande Mataram*, 21 September 1907.

provincial and chauvinistic colour,[4] and it is significant that while the swadeshi upsurge struck a chord in far-off Maharashtra, Punjab or even the South, the neighbouring Biharis, Oriyas and Assamese with few exceptions remained utterly aloof if not positively hostile to what was after all essentially a Bengali movement. But it is only fair to remember certain instances of genuine pan-Indian thinking, manifested for example in the 'Eka-lipi-vistara Parishad' set up in Calcutta in 1907 to promote Devanagari as the common script for all Indian languages.[5] "Hindi ought to be the lingua franca of India as it is the easiest and the most largely spoken language in the country", declared the *Dawn* in June 1908; another issue of the same journal contained an adaptation of an article from the *Hindustan Review* of Allahabad pointing out the dangers of making that language too Sanskritised or Persianised, and preferring the term Hindusthani, since "it does not savour of the Hindu too prominently".[6] Thus the Bengali nationalist of 1905, still serenely confident of the leading position of his community in the cultural and political life of the subcontinent, could combine with relative ease deep regional patriotism with a more abstract but still real identification with India as a whole—a combination which would prove increasingly difficult from the 1920s onwards, as the centre of gravity in the national movement shifted to Gujarat and Hindi-speaking Upper India.

Future problems notwithstanding, however, the Bengali patriotism of the swadeshi days brought forth an extremely impressive cultural outcrop, and the poet Satyendranath Dutta was not indulging in excessive hyperbole when he hailed in 1905 "the golden age that has dawned in Bengal".[7] The impact was of course most obvious in songs, poems.

[4] As for instance in the talk of Assamese 'backwardness' in the early days of the antipartition agitation—cf. above, Chapter II, p. 41.

[5] *Dawn and Dawn Society's Magazine*, January 1908.

[6] "Hindusthani Language as the Common Language of India"—adapted from an article by V. N. Mehta, ICS, in the *Hindustan Review* (Allahabad)—*Ibid*, October 1908.

[7] "Banga-itihase aj elo swarna yuga!"—*Sandikshan* (1905)

plays and jatras, and the vitally important political role of these art forms in propagating the swadeshi cause has been discussed in a previous chapter.[8] The high seriousness and intellectual and literary quality of the innumerable essays on swadeshi themes published during these years in the periodical press cannot but fail to arouse our admiration. Much less evident was the influence on fiction, except for a few short stories of Prabhatkumar Mukhopadhyay[9] and two little-known novels of Gangacharan Nag and Narayanchandra Bhattacharyya[10]—as well as of course Rabindranath's *Gora* (1907-10) and *Ghare-baire* (1915), so invaluable for understanding the inner tensions of the age. The Bangiya Sahitya Parishad, founded in 1894, entered upon the period of its greatest activity and influence under the enthusiastic stewardship of Ramendrasundar Trivedi (secretary of the organisation from 1904 to 1911) and Byomkesh Mustafi. The Bangiya Sahitya Sammilan, an annual literary conference, met for the first time in 1907 with Rabindranath in the chair.[11]

As in the Ireland of Yeats's youth, nationalism stimulated interest in literary history and folk traditions, indicated for instance in the researches of Dineshchandra Sen, and at another level by *Thakumar jhuli* (Grandma's Tales, 1907), Dakshinaranjan Mitra Majumdar's immortal collection of fairy tales of old Bengal.[12]

[8] Cf. above, Chapter VI. The best available account of the impact of swadeshi on literature is Soumendra Gangopadhyay, *Swadeshi andolan o bangla sahitya* (1960).

[9] *Khalash* describes the conversion to patriotism of a Bengali magistrate through the influence of his wife: *Ukiler buddhi* ridicules the sycophancy of a lawyer; *Hate hate phal* is about an oppressive police constable. *Prabasi*, Bhadra 1314 (1907), Kartik 1314 (1907), Sravana 1315 (1908).

[10] *Rakhi-kankan* (1907), *Nabibidhan* (1907). For a description of these two novels, cf. Soumendra Gangopadhyay, *op. cit.*, pp. 291-94.

[11] *Sahitya-sadhak-charitmala*, Volume VI, n. 70 (Ramendrasundar Trivedi).

[12] Rabindranath emphasised the swadeshi importance of the indigenous fairy-tale in his preface to the first edition of *Thakumar jhuli*—even

Historical research in the more conventional sense also felt the swadeshi wind—Nikhilnath Roy's chronicles of Murshidabad (1898, 1904); Akshoykumar Maitra's famous biographies of Sirajuddoula (1897) and Mir Kasim (1905); the journal *Aitihasik Chitra* and the Varendra Research Society of Rajshahi, both founded by Akshoykumar; the more enduring works of Haraprasad Sastri and Rakhaldas Banerji; and the first writings of the talented young men whom Satischandra Mukherji had collected around his *Dawn*—including Radhakumud Mukherji, Haranchandra Chakladar, Rabindranarayan Ghosh and the sociologist Benoykumar Sarkar. An occasional contributor to the *Dawn* was Jadunath Sarkar, who had just begun his masterly studies of Mughal and Maratha history with *India of Aurangzeb* (1901).[13]

More indirect but still undoubted was the impact on science. The achievements of J. C. Bose and P. C. Ray thrilled all patriotic hearts, the *Prabasi* going so far as to call Jagadishchandra's *Plant Response* the greatest swadeshi event of 1906.[14] Science and patriotism were closely associated in the work of these pioneers, who felt, quite rightly, that their research was helping to put India and Bengal on the map of world culture—a consciousness vividly reflected, for instance, in the correspondence between J. C. Bose and his intimate friend Rabindranath. The great physicist and his wife also became close friends of Nivedita. Prafullachandra Ray founded through his magnificent teaching something like an 'Indian school of chemistry';[15] his *History of Hindu Chemistry* (1902, 1909) represented one of the best fruits of swadeshi scholarship—and he was also perhaps the most remarkable of the swadeshi industrial entrepreneurs. The closing years of the

such things, he said, had so long been coming from the "Manchester factory".

[13] Bimalaprasad Mukherji, *History—Studies in the Bengal Renaissance*, pp. 371-81.

[14] *Prabasi*, Bhadra 1313 (1906).

[15] The phrase is used by Prafullachandra himself—*Life and Experiences of a Bengali Chemist*, Volume I, Chapter XIII.

swadeshi epoch saw a real galaxy of brilliant young science students studying more or less together in Presidency College, and between 1910 and 1913 graduated Rasiklal Dutta, Nilratan Dhar, Jnanendrachandra Ghosh, Jnanendranath Mukhopadhyay, Meghnad Saha, Satyendranath Bose.[16]

The Indian Sangita Samaj founded in 1897 by Jyotirindranath Tagore and the Maharaja of Natore[17] promoted the cause of classical Indian music in Calcutta; by 1905 this music club had acquired, interestingly enough, some political notoriety.[18] But most fascinating of all perhaps was the impact of swadeshi on art. Stimulated by the orientalist enthusiasm of Okakura, Nivedita and Havell as well as by the contact with the visiting Japanese artists Taikan and Hisida, Abanindranath Tagore and his pupils broke sharply with the imitations of Victorian naturalist taste which had come to dominate what there was of Indian art in the late 19th century. They turned back for inspiration to the great heritage of India, Mughal and Rajput paintings and the superb art of Ajanta—a heritage which men like Griffiths, Fergusson and Rajendralal Mitra had begun to explore way back in the 1870s, but which became an influence on living artists only in the swadeshi days.[19] The Indian Society of Oriental Art was founded in March 1907, and held periodic exhibitions of the new style; among the first recipients of the society's scholarships was Nandalal Bose.[20] Some of

[16] List of First Class Graduates—*Presidency College Centenary Volume* (1956), pp. 97, 100.

[17] *Indian Mirror*, 2 October 1897, 26 January 1898.

[18] The Sangita Samaj is listed among 'Clubs and societies in Calcutta, which have been concerned in the present swadeshi movement'—Report on the Agitation Against the Partition of Bengal, 25 January 1906, Enclosure H—Home Public Progs A, June 1906, n. 175.

[19] Asok Mitra, *The Forces Behind the Modern Movement—Four Painters* (1965), pp. 1-4.

[20] Rabindranarayan Ghosh, "Indian Nationalism and Indian Art"—*Dawn*, May, June, September 1910. An India Society was set up in 1910 to popularise the school in England with Havell, Rothenstein, Coomaraswami and Ratcliffe among its leading members—*Dawn*, November 1910.

Abanindranath's paintings had a direct political content, most notably his Bharat-mata (Mother India) which sent Nivedita into ecstasies[21] and served as a banner in some swadeshi demonstrations;[22] his more adventurous brother and fellow-artist Gaganendranath even had some revolutionary connections.[23] And in a well-known poem Satyendranath Dutta hailed the rekindling "in this city of ours" of the lamp once lit by India's great artist Dhiman.[24] The permanent artistic value of this first phase of the Calcutta school is more open to question. There were some contemporary critics—like Upendrakishore Raychaudhuri, who warned against the danger of a total rejection of western canons and models,[25] or the *Sahitya* commentator who accused neotraditionalist art of being "contrary to nature and bonelessly serpentine".[26] Even Coomaraswami, the theorist of 'Art and Swadeshi', had to admit that compared to its classical models, the new art was all too often "sentimental in conception, weak in drawing", and "frequently markedly lacking in strength".[27] Fortunately, however, the great

[21] The *Prabasi* of Bhadra 1313 reproduced the Bharat-mata with a note by Nivedita hailing it as "the first masterpiece in which an Indian artist has actually succeeded in disengaging, as it were, the spirit of the motherland—giver of Faith and Learning, of Clothing and Food—and portraying Her, as She appears in the eyes of Her children..."

[22] Abanindranath Tagore and Rani Chanda, *Gharoa* (1941), p. 9.

[23] Statement of Abinash Bhattacharyya—Bhupendranath Dutta. *Bharater dwitiya swadhinata sangram*, p. 196.

[24] *Ekada je dwip jwalalo Dhiman se dwip aji e nagari jwale*
Pancha pradip Abani Gagan Asit Mukul Nandalal-e/

[25] Upendrakishore objected in particular to Havell's removal of western paintings from the Government Art College, and embarked upon two long controversies with Abanindranath in the pages of the *Bhandar* (Jaistha 1312/1905) and *Modern Review* (April-June 1907). The father of Sukumar Ray and the grandfather of Satyajit Ray, Upendrakishore himself was a noted artist, photographer, innovater in printing technique and writer of exquisite tales for children.

[26] *Sahitya*, Baisakh 1317 (1910)—cited in Asok Mitra, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

[27] A. K. Coomaraswami, *The Modern School of Indian Painting* (1911)—quoted in Asok Mitra, *op. cit.*, p. 26.

artists soon outgrew the patriotic drill. Abanindranath experimented with ever-new forms, his brother tried his hand at cubism, and from the 1920s Rabindranath began his amazing series of paintings, utterly and magnificently different from the somewhat anaemic pseudoclassicism of much of later 'oriental' art. "Swadeshi had served its turn, but served better still as it slowly retired from the scene."[28]

No other phase of our national movement can boast of a cultural accompaniment as rich as swadeshi, and it is noteworthy how many of the songs which inspired later generations of patriots—whether terrorist, Gandhian, or communist—were composed in the partition days.[29] But it would be extremely unwise to try to gauge the depth and importance of the movement itself by the richness of its cultural outcrop. Literature, after all, is bound to remain very much of an elite concern, particularly in a society like ours with its abysmally low literacy rate, and the historian must avoid the temptation of looking at an age through the eyes of its intellectuals alone.[30]

A sense of anticlimax is in fact bound to haunt any historian of swadeshi Bengal. Partition was revoked, it is true, after six years; but by then Curzon's original folly had become a minor issue for most patriots. The reforms of 1909, too belated and paltry to really satisfy even the moderates, were vitiated by the simultaneous encouragement they gave to Muslim separatism. The ideal of complete swaraj came to be cherished by the underground revolutionaries alone—the mainstream of the national movement accepted it only twenty years later. Boycott had come and gone, leaving hardly a dent in the rising curve of foreign imports; swadeshi indus-

[28] Asok Mitra, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

[29] The latest—and by far the most moving—example is of course the adoption of Rabindranath's 'Amar sonar bangla' as the national anthem by embattled Bangladesh.

[30] Thus, to give a converse example, it is difficult to accept R. C. Majumdar's denigration of 1857 on the ground of that great rebellion having failed to arouse the sympathy of "contemporary Indian writers". *History of the Freedom Movement in India*, Volume I, p. 242.

tries and national schools petered out; the trade unions proved extremely shortlived; and most of the samitis were crushed by the police with surprising ease. Of the diverse trends which had composed the rich tapestry of the swadeshi age, only the two poles remained active after 1908—on the one hand a mendicancy as servile and even less effective than pre-1905 politics, on the other the heroic blind alley of the terrorists. On the level of ideals, too, Rabindranath's lofty dream of building a mahajati in our land remained no more than a solitary vision.

The decline was only temporary, to be sure, as the Gandhian movement was to reveal after 1918, reviving many of the forms and techniques of the swadeshi days; but the fall in tempo during the intervening years remains an indisputable fact. In the drama of Dwijendralal Roy, the strident patriotism of *Rana Pratapsingh* (May 1905) gave place to the quiet introspective melancholy of *Mewar-patan* (December 1908)—the red flag flies no more over the hill of Mewar,[31] Chitor is lost, but its people can still try "to become men again"[32] by conquering the weaknesses in their own society. The unity of humanist values and socially effective action which had been Rabindranath's ideal in *Gora* has broken down, and we are faced instead with the stark *Ghare-baire* dichotomy of Nikhilesh and Sandwip.

It has been one of the central themes of the previous chapters that this failure cannot be explaind in terms of police repression alone—thus it is significant that only two cases of firing on demonstrators are on record for the entire 1903-8 period, and the men involved were Jamalpur railwaymen on strike and Sherpur Muslim rioters, not swadeshi crowds. The failure resulted rather from certain inner weaknesses—at once social and religious—of the movement itself, in particular the inability to draw in the peasant masses and to bridge the gulf between the Hindus and the Mus-

31 *Mewar-pahar, shikhare tahar, rakta-pataka ore na ar*
E heena sajja, e ghoro lajja, dheke de gabheera andhakar!

32 *Kisher shoka karish bhai—abar tora manush ha*
Gyecche desh dukkha nai—abar tora manush ha!

lims. In a concluding essay, it seems proper to sum up in more general terms the social character of the movement, as well as the structural limitations which ultimately led to its decline.

No great difficulty exists in specifying the social groups attracted by swadeshi. Students and educated young men in general obviously deserve pride of place as contributing the bulk of the samiti volunteers. Among their elders, the members of the bhadralok professions of law, teaching, journalism and medicine in town and country were particularly prominent; while the swadeshi spectrum extended to include a number of big zamindars at one end of the social scale, and, at the other, 'amlas' or officials and dependants of patriotic landlords and considerable segments of clerks or white-collar employees in government offices, private firms and even certain industries.[33]

Professional men, families which could afford higher education for their sons, even clerks in some cases—still very often had a connection with land in the form of intermediate tenures, if not zamindari shares, and going through the official records, one sometimes gets the impression that all that was happening in the districts was landlord coercion of tenants into giving up bideshi articles. "Where boycott and political agitation are most dangerous and mischievous", asserted a report on the conduct of the Gauripur landlords, "either local zamindars or local zamindari servants are at the bottom of the mischief".[34] Hare reminded Minto of the "terrible power" of the "unscrupulous landlord",[35] while the viceroy on his part had already informed the secretary of state "of the resemblance in the new province to our Irish difficulties",[36] with the proswadeshi Hindu zamin-

[33] See above, Chapters V-VII.

[34] Conduct of the Zamindars of Gauripur in Connection with the Political Agitation in the Mymensingh District—Home Political Progs A, February 1908, n. 102-3.

[35] Hare to Minto, 21 November 1907—Minto Papers, M981.

[36] Minto to Morley, 15 August 1906—Minto Papers, M1006.

dar being obviously cast for the part of the absentee English landlord.

It is possible, however, to misinterpret or overemphasise the link between swadeshi and zamindari pressure, real as the connection was at certain localities and times. The Anglo-Indian bureaucrat always liked to think of himself as paternal protector of the raiyat, and the Irish parallel had an obvious propaganda value in convincing a Liberal administration increasingly at loggerheads with the House of Lords of the need for a tough policy in India. Actually the importance of the big zamindar in the swadeshi movement seems to have been considerably exaggerated. In the first —highly respectable—phase of the antipartition agitation, such men were certainly very prominent—Manindrachandra Nandi of Kasimbazar, the Maharaja of Natore, Maharaja Jyotindramohan Tagore, Sitanath Roy of Bhagyakul, Maharaja Surjyakanta Acharyya Chaudhuri of Muktagaccha, Asutosh Chaudhuri of Pabna and even Pearymohun Mukherji of Uttarpara (who in 1898 had denounced "the irrepressible regiment of Congress leaders"[37]); the Bengal Landholders' Association was also extremely active.[38] But the already-established literary stereotype of the zaminder as title-hunting opportunist[39] was soon confirmed by the hasty retreat of the big names—Girijanath Roy of Dinajpur as early as October 1906;[40] the Maharaja of Darbhanga, who

[37] At the annual meeting of the British Indian Association, 30 July 1898—a speech violently attacked by the future swadeshi leader Aswinicoomar Banerji in letters published in the *Indian Mirror*, 18 August, 15 and 23 September 1898. Rabindranath commented on this 'Mukherji-Banerji' duel in two articles—"Mukherjje banam barrujje" (*Bharati*, Bhadra 1305/August-September 1898) and "Apar paksher katha" (*Ibid*, Aswin 1305/September-October 1898).

[38] See above, Chapter VII.

[39] As for instance in Amritalal Basu's *Sabash bangali*, Act II, Scene II, and Haranath Basu's play *Jagaran* described in *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 5 January 1906, where an unpatriotic zamindar is brought to his senses by social boycott.

[40] Abstract of Reports...from Eastern Bengal and Assam during first half of October 1906—Home Public Progs A, December 1906, n. 310-11.

by December 1906 had discovered that "with the Hindus Loyalty or Rajbhakti is an element of religion";[41] the 107 zaminder signatories to the British Indian Association loyalist manifesto of 8 August 1907, including even Surjyakanta Acharyya Chaudhuri;[42] and Sitanath Roy, offering after May 1908 his "support to measures however stringent for the suppression of anarchy".[43] The classic example of consistent servility came, however, from the Maharaja of Burdwan, who fully maintained his family's 1857 record by erecting at the height of the swadeshi movement a Curzon Gate, tartly described by the *Bengalee* as both ludicrous in appearance and a hindrance to traffic.[44] While there were some generous zamindar patrons of swadeshi enterprise like Manindrachandra Nandi or Biprodas Palchaudhuri of Nadia, from many even financial help was not too readily forthcoming—as indicated by the interesting if libellous police report giving a list of "uncollected (probably irrecoverable) donations to the National Fund up to 31 August 1906",[45] as well as by the fact that the revolutionaries from

[41] Speech at a meeting of the Sri Bharat Dharma Mahamandal—*Bengalee*, 25 December 1906.

[42] Diary of Political Events 1907—Home Political Progs Deposit, March 1908, n. 1. *Sandhya*, 19 August 1907—RNP(B) for week ending 24 August 1907.

[43] Diary of Political Events, 1908, entry for 9 July—Home Political Progs Deposit, March 1909, n. 1.

[44] *Bengalee*, 11 January 1907.

[45] Here is the list in full:

Names of Persons	*Donations Promised (Rs)*	*Amount Actually Paid (Rs)*	*Balance*
Maharaja Surjya Kanta (Mymensingh)	10,000	——	10,000
T. Palit (Calcutta)	5,000	1,000	4,000
Manindra Nandy (Cossimbazar)	5,000	——	5,000
Santosh Brothers (Calcutta)	3,000	1,000	2,000
Giridhari & Janaki Roy (Calcutta)	5,000	1,500	3,500
Dighapatia (Calcutta)	2,500	1,100	1,400
Gajendranath Tagore (Calcutta)	5,000	100	4,900
Abdul Sobhan Chaudhuri (Mymensingh)	1,000	200	800

an early date had to take to the path of swadeshi docoity. Only a small minority among big zamindars remained active throughout in radical politics, the most notable of them being Brojendrakishore Roychaudhuri of Gauripur,[46] Narendralal Khan of Narajole, Digambar Nanda of Contai,[47] Rajendranath Mukherji or Misri Babu of Uttarpara (the son of Pearymohun) and Jatindranath Raychaudhuri of Taki.[48] As has been repeatedly indicated in previous chapters, the really ubiquitous social element in swadeshi organisations was not the big zamindar—extremely helpful as his presence was always recognised to be—but the intermediate tenure-holder, particularly numerous in well-known storm-centres like Barisal, Madaripur, Vikrampur or Kishore

Names of Persons	*Donations Promised (Rs)*	*Amount Actually Paid (Rs)*	*Balance*
Maharaja of Natore	1,000	—	1,000
Debendranath Tagore	1,000	—	1,000
Jogendrachandra Bose (Chandernagore)	1,000	200	800
Anathnath Mullick (Chorebagan)	500	—	500
Jogendranath „ (”)	500	—	500
Surendranath „ (”)	500	50	450
Charuchandra „ (Pataldanga)	500	100	400
Nalin Behari Sirkar (Calcutta)	500	250	250
Total :	**42,000**	**5,500**	**36,500**

—Abstract of Reports from Bengal during the Second Half of August 1906, Home Public Progs B, October 1906, n. 13.

[46] The local government wanted to attach his lands in January 1908, a proposal vetoed by the government of India. Home Public Progs A, February 1908, n. 102-3.

[47] For the revolutionary activities of these two Midnapur zamindars. see Benoyjiban Ghosh, *Agniyuger astraguru hemchandra*, pp. 53-57 and Home Political Progs A, March 1910, n. 33-40.

[48] Both Rajendranath and Jatindranath figured in the March 1910 list of 53 proposed deportees—the latter because “an abnormal number of the members of the revolutionary party have come from the villages of Taki and Arbelia, which is close by”. Home Political Progs A, March 1910, n. 33-40.

gunj;[49] but here again surely an Aswini Dutta, a Kaliprasanna Dasgupta, an Ambicacharan Majumdar or a Surendranath Sen owed their popularity and leadership much more to their professional roles as teachers or pleaders than to their status as minor landholders.

If the precise social groups drawn into swadeshi can be identified fairly easily, much more problematic is the attempt to bring together the swadeshi participants under some more general category of class or status group—a difficult but necessary task, if swadeshi is to be related to the social and economic conditions of its own age as well as to the phenomenon of nationalism in other countries and times.

Proceeding on the analogy of European nationalist movements, many have been tempted to see in swadeshi an essentially "middle class" affair, an important stage in India's advance along "bourgeois-democratic" lines. Moderate and extremist may then even appear to have some resemblance to Girondin and Jacobin. "In its earliest phase", wrote Rajani Palme Dutt, "Indian nationalism...reflected only the big bourgeoisie"; swadeshi, on the other hand, "reflected the discontent of the urban petty bourgeoisie, but did not yet reach the masses".[50] Dutt added the rider that the Hindu-revivalist ideology of the extremists severely curtailed the progressive possibilities of their movement; with much less inhibition, recent Soviet historians like Reisner or Komarov proclaim the "petty-bourgeois democratic" character of the 1905 upsurge.[51]

A distinction between various levels of analysis seems necessary here. In very general terms, there can be little doubt that the Indian national movement of which swadeshi was such an important part objectively did help to at least partially clear the way for the independent capitalist development of our country. Subjectively too on the level of economic ideals, the moderate intellectuals with their conception

[49] See above, Chapter VII.
[50] R. P. Dutt, *India Today* (2nd edition, 1947), p. 264.
[51] Reisner and Goldberg (ed), *Tilak and the Struggle for Indian Freedom* (1966).

of modern industry as the panacea for India's woes were visualising the future of the country in terms broadly capitalist in nature. The swadeshi-extremist modifications in that programme often remind the historian of the petty-bourgeois critique of big capital so common in European romantic thought—though here the parallel was hardly complete, as we have seen,[52] and apart from the handful of pioneer barrister labour-leaders (hardly petty-bourgeois and not invariably extremist), there was precious little awareness of the evils of capitalism as affecting concretely the lives of Indian workers; the critique of factory industries developed rather from a general nationalist rejection of western models. Conscious contemporary use of the middle-class analogy is also not too rare. Thus Aswinicoomar Banerji in his polemic with Pearymohun Mukherji asserted that "It is the middle-class gentry who form the backbone of the Congress", not the "mushroom aristocracy",[53] and Bepinchandra Pal declared in 1906 that the extremists were "making an appeal to the country... calling up the masses everywhere, the common shopkeeper and artisan, the Musulman trader and Marwari broker and sowkar—men who had rarely been invited before to attend our meetings..."[54] But the simplistic version of the Marxian class-approach used by R. P. Dutt or certain Soviet historians still encounters major difficulties if we pass from ideology to questions of social composition. Pal's hopes notwithstanding, there remain the inconvenient facts of the indifference or even hostility shown towards swadeshi by the bulk of the professional trading community in Bengal, and the at best lukewarm attitude of the industrial bourgeoisie of Bombay and Gujarat.[55] Glib talk about the 'urban' petty-bourgeois character of the 1905 upsurge obscures the link which so many of the swadeshi participants retained with land through zamindari or intermediate tenure. Despite certain 'bourgeois'

[52] See above, Chapter III, 1.
[53] *Indian Mirror*, 23 September 1898. See f.n. 37 above.
[54] "The Shell and the Seed"—*Bande Mataram*, 17 September 1906.
[55] A. P. Kannangara, "Indian Millowners and Indian Nationalism" —*Past and Present*, No. 40 (July 1968).

aspirations, the Bengali 'middle class' was thus essentially different from its European counterpart in being virtually unconnected with capitalist forms of trade, industry or agriculture—whence perhaps the peculiar ineptitude of so much of swadeshi entrepreneurship. The broadening of nationalism during 1905-8 evidently involved the spread of political consciousness among certain lower-income groups (e.g. the white-collar employees of printing presses and railways, so prominent in the strikes of the period); a clear class-differential between moderate and extremist would still be very difficult to establish, and was obviously nonexistent at the leadership level.

The alternative bhadralok category—currently so fashionable among western historians, no doubt partly because it seems to keep Marxism in its place[56]—has the merit of emphasising the very real social barrier in our country (in 1905 and to a considerable extent even today) between the babu or gentleman, the man with some amount of education, clean clothes and hands unsoiled with manual labour, who must be addressed as 'apni' even if his purse happens to be nearly empty, and the men who work with their hands in fields or factories. Despite some efforts to organise jute mill-hands, or the popularity enjoyed by a leader like Aswinikumar Dutta among ordinary Barisal villagers, it cannot be denied that swadeshi remained basically a bhadralok affair. The trouble about this term, in fact, is that it seems much too broad, ranging presumably from the Maharaja of Mymensingh to the East Indian Railway clerk; it consequently offers little or no real guide in any study of socio-economic compulsions behind political action. The subcate-

[56] Thus Anil Seal assures us that the Marxian class analysis is quite inappropriate in 19th or early 20th century Indian conditions. "Social classes based on economic categories" did not yet exist, and so nationalism must be explained in terms of Bengali bhadralok or Chitpavan Brahmin status-aspirations, and not as the upthrust of an emerging national bourgeoisie. *The Emergence of Indian Nationalism—Competition and Collaboration in the Later Nineteenth Century* (1968), p. 34 and passim.

gory of 'lower-class bhadralok' invented by J. H. Broomfield[57] to explain the broader appeals of extremism and Gandhism hardly improves matters; the petty-bourgeoisie, it seems, is making a shame-faced reentrance. The tacit identification often made between bhadralok and certain Hindu upper castes (Brahmin, Vaidya, Kayastha) is also not quite tenable—how are we to categorise, for example, a Brahmin cook or a village priest?

Still more controversial and open to question are the attempts so often being made today to interpret nationalism as being no more than a rationalisation of selfish and narrow status interests. The bhadralok became anti-British, we are told in effect by historians like Anil Seal or J. H. Broomfield, primarily because their job-aspirations were not satisfied and their professional and rent-incomes were being eroded by the rise in prices; the talk about the country as a whole suffering from imperialist exploitation is assumed to have been no more than an ideological trapping, not to be taken too seriously.[58] Thus we have a kind of Namierisation—without of course Namier's massive command over a rich variety of sources, ruled out here for many by the language barrier. The reductio ad absurdum of this approach is provided by Seal, with his—one hopes, only half-serious—comment on Bankimchandra's patriotic novels arising out of frustration in his job.[59]

Interpretations of bhadralok nationalism in terms of educated unemployment and price-increase were common enough, for fairly obvious reasons, among early-20th century British officials and apologists[60]—the minds of contemporary

[57] J. H. Broomfield. *Elite Conflict in a Plural Society—Twentieth-Century Bengal* (1968).

[58] A somewhat similar approach is being tried out nowadays in the history of West Asian nationalism—see for instance Elie Kedourie, *Afghani and Abduh* (London, 1966).

[59] Anil Seal, *op. cit.*, p. 118.

[60] As for instance Valentine Chirol's *Indian Unrest* (1910) and the *Bengal District Administration Committee Report of 1915*. The latter found Chirol's estimate of the absolute volume of educated unemployment to be exaggerated, but emphasised the very low salaries

Anglo-Indian bureaucrats and present-day pseudo-Namierite scholars often seem to work in significant unison. The directness of the link between economics and political action may still be questioned. A 1915 analysis of "several hundred" East Bengal political suspects found 43 per cent to have sufficient private means and 15 per cent with satisfactory jobs; of the remaining 42 per cent unemployed or working on scanty salaries, quite a number must have remained jobless out of political choice.[61] The price-rise was spectacular enough during 1905-8[62], and the abovequoted report emphasised the "distress among the smaller noncultivating tenure-holders"[63] caused by it. But the rise in agricultural prices may have benefited those among the bhadralok who drew rents in kind—and the *Bakargunj District Gazetteer* (1918) spoke of the growing Hindu upper-caste preference for letting out land on barga or sharecropping terms[64]; obviously there is considerable scope here for detailed research into the economic position of bhadralok tenure-holders—a task beyond the scope of the present work and the competence of its author. For what it is worth, one might add that the swadeshi political agitators not unoften give an impression of relative economic stability, at least as compared to more recent times. Sukumar Mitra, the son of Krishnakumar and one of the leaders of the Anti-Circular Society, informed me in an interview that volunteers in those days were never given anything like party wages—presumably they could live on their own. One recalls also the volunteers in Mukunda Das's jatra, so sure of their "mere rice and dal".[65] The price-rise certainly caused distress and

(from Rs 10 to Rs 30 a month) of most clerks in private trading concerns, private school-teachers and zamindari officials—such men, it stated, formed a kind of disgruntled "intellectual proletariat"—pp. 163, 171-72.

61 *Bengal District Administration Committee Report*, p. 168.
62 See above, p. 25 for the K. L. Dutta Committee estimates.
63 *Bengal District Administration Committee Report*, p. 164.
64 *Bakargunj District Gazetteer* (1918), p. 72.
65 Mukunda Das, *Palli-seva* (n.d), Scene II, p. 7. See above, Chapter VII.

contributed to strikes as well as to the Mymensingh riots of 1906-7[66]; the crucial point is that such discontent did not necessarily have to take anti-British forms—usually it turned against the immediate local oppressor : zamindar, mahajan, trader, even sometimes the swadeshi agitator trying to banish the cheaper foreign articles from the market. The one swadeshi pamphlet that I know of dealing with the price issue as its principal subject began with a refutation of the argument—obviously not uncommon—that boycott was responsible for the dearness of goods.[67] Thus economic distress could lead to nationalist politics only via the 'mediation' of an ideology—in this case the theory of British economic exploitation; and yet some recent historians apparently believe that the drain theory may be almost ignored while studying the emergence of Indian nationalism.[68]

Both the current Marxist interpretations and their elitist alternatives thus suffer from the common defect of assuming too direct or crude an economic motivation for political action and ideals. The former seek to relate nationalism far too mechanically with the general structure of colonial exploitation; the latter in contrast conjure away such connections, and explaining political unrest in terms of material elite-interests, virtually dismiss imperialism itself as a myth.

On the methodological level, it seems necessary today to break out of the bog of narrow positivism, which arbitrarily denies to historical personalities the ability to see beyond their noses—an attitude very obviously present in theoreticians of the bhadralok and by no means absent in much current 'Marxist' history-writing. Shorn of certain dogmatic oversimplifications alien to the spirit of its founders, the Marxist approach still seems much more relevant to the problems of Indian nationalism than its fashionable elitist substitutes. A certain divergence between the objective character of a movement as judged by its general results,

[66] See above, Chapter VIII. iii.
[67] Surjyakumar Ghoshal, *Bharate annakashta* (February 1908), p. 1.
[68] See for example the extremely cursory treatment of this subject in Anil Seal.

and the actual social composition of its participants, is by no means peculiar to swadeshi Bengal. As Isaac Deutscher reminds us, even the English and the French revolutions can be meaningfully considered "bourgeois" primarily because they created "the conditions in which bourgeois property can flourish"—and not because capitalist entrepreneurs, merchants or bankers were particularly conspicuous in Puritan or Jacobin ranks.[69] One might use here also Trotsky's very interesting concept of 'substitutism'—a recurrent theme according to him of nineteenth-century Russian history, with the intelligentsia acting repeatedly as a kind of proxy for as-yet passive social forces with which it had little organic connection.[70] It might even be profitable to consider the politically-active groups in the early stages of Indian nationalism as an 'intelligentsia' of this kind, since what most obviously distinguished them from the rest of society was not class or caste consciousness but education and its concomitant—responsiveness to nationalist ideology. Also extremely relevant might be the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci's brilliant but little-known analysis of the formation and role of the 'traditional', as distinct from the 'organic', intellectuals; men of learning, not directly connected with the production-process, who for that very reason may be swayed by new cultural or ideological forces to the point of being won over in part by the the emergent revolutionary class.[71] The English-educated elite of Bengal, recruited overwhelmingly from the tradi-

[69] Isaac Deutscher, *The Unfinished Revolution—Russia 1917-1967* (1967), pp. 21-22.

[70] Thus the Decembrists had 'substituted' for the liberal bourgeoisie, the Narodniks for a mute peasantry and the early Russian Marxists for the still-largely-unorganised proletariat. Trotsky first outlined this theory in a brilliant essay written in 1912—Isaac Deutscher, *The Prophet Armed* (1954), p. 190. In his *History of the Russian Revolution* (1934), Trotsky saw substitutism as a notable characteristic of backward societies striving to modernise themselves—Volume I, Chapter I, p. 30.

[71] Antonio Gramsci, "The Formation of Intellectuals", *The Modern Prince and Other Writings* (1957).

tional learned castes, and virtually unconnected after the 1850s with commerce or industry (or even with agriculture, in the sense of real productive enterprise), may be regarded perhaps as a 'traditional' intelligentsia in Gramsci's sense, responding readily—if often a bit superficially—to world ideological currents—liberalism, nationalism, eventually in part even socialism.

The ultimately more fundamental facts of socio-economic structure should be considered, I suggest, as setting limits to effective political action, rather than motivating it in any direct or crude way. Thus irrespective of his precise economic condition, the price-rise and the threat to outside employment opportunities must have made the bhadralok tenure-holder more conscious of the value of his rent-income—whence perhaps the complete absence of any radical agrarian programme, in contrast to the 1870s and '80s. And precisely here, as we have seen in earlier chapters[72], lay the crucial weakness of the entire swadeshi movement—its failure to break through to the peasant masses. Not Jacobin France, therefore, but Risorgimento Italy offers the best European parallel to Bengal extremism: "To effectively counter the moderate programme, they had to create an alternative programme that would attract the rural masses, almost four-fifths of the people. Only an economic and social programme of the 'Jacobin' type would have offered a viable alternative to moderate politics... (But) the petty-bourgeois social base of the actionists retained a semiagrarian character that limited its autonomy vis-a-vis the older landowning class and also made it fear the possible economic demands of the peasantry... Finally, the 'national' character of the Risorgimento—its goal of expelling the Austrians and forming an Italian state—made it easy for the moderates, and even some actionists, to neglect the social character of the revolution in the interests of achieving the largest possible unity of action."[73]

[72] See above, Chapter VI. pp. 333-35; Chapter VII. pp. 359, 389-90.

[73] Gramsci's famous analysis of the Risorgimento, almost uncannily

In Bengal, the intelligentsia's indifference to peasant problems did not result merely from immediate material interests; behind it lay also the long bhadralok tradition of contempt or at best condescension for the men who worked with their hands, the sense of alienation flowing from education through a foreign medium, as well as by the fact that the line of demarcation between bhadralok landholder and peasant commoner tended in some districts to merge with that separating Hindus from Muslims. Here again the connection is not that of direct motivation—nationalism was certainly far more than a mere rationalisation of bhadralok Hindu injured vanity. But it has to be admitted that the average Bengali swadeshi agitator or extremist entered politics with a stock of inherited assumptions and attitudes—all the more dangerous for being very largely unconscious—concerning the uneducated common folk and in particular the Muslims among them. Such an inheritance obviously inhibited not only the formulation of radical social programmes, but also—despite some sincere efforts and in significant contrast to Gandhism—the working-out of a political idiom or style with genuine mass appeal.

It is possible to argue, of course, that even if the intelligentsia had taken a more positive propeasant (and consistently secular) stance, the countryside may have remained unresponsive—one might recall the tragedy of the Narodniks of nineteenth-century Russia. Certainly the early periods of Indian nationalism, extremist as well as moderate, seem to have coincided with a relative lull in peasant movements, extending from the 1880s to the upsurges of the post-first-world-war years. The peasant world of India and Bengal still awaits its historian, and only detailed research on agrarian conditions and peasant psychology might help us one day to understand the roots of what is perhaps modern India's greatest tragedy—the failure to intermingle the currents of national and social discontent into a single anticolonial and

appropriate to our problem, as paraphrased in John M. Cammett, *Antonio Gramsci and the Origins of Italian Communism* (1967), p. 214.

antifeudal revolution. Coming back to swadeshi times, however, peasant passivity might be considered as a third objective limitation to the nationalism of the intelligentsia.

Thus the limits of the swadeshi movement in Bengal were set ultimately by the socio-economic structure and cultural traditions inherited by the men of 1905. "Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly found, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living."[74]

[74] Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1852)—*Historical Writings* (1944), Volume I, p. 293.

CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE

1899	January	Viceroyalty of Curzon.
1905	November	
1899	September	Reduction of elected element in Calcutta Corporation.
1901		Rabindranath's Santiniketan 'asrama'.
1902	March	Foundation of Anushilan Samiti, Indian Stores.
	June	First Shivaji 'utsava' in Calcutta.
	July	Foundation of Dawn Society.
	October	Birastami festival (Sarala Debi).
1903	28 March	Fraser Note proposing transfer of Chittagong Division, Dacca, Mymensingh to Assam.
	19 May-1 June	Curzon's *Minute on Territorial Redistribution.*
	3 December	Publication of Risley Letter.
	17 December	Conference organised by Bengal Landholders' Association.
1903	December	First round of protest meetings.
1904	March	
1904	February	Curzon's E. Bengal tour.
	18 March	Town Hall meeting and memorial (Peary Mukherji).
	March	Universities Act.
	March	Jogendrachandra Ghosh's Association for Advancement of Scientific and Industrial Education.
	June	Burdwan Provincial Conference—"A subject nation has no politics" (Asutosh Chaudhuri).
	July	Rabindranath's *Swadeshi samaj* address.
	November	Foundation of *Sandhya.*
1905	10 January	Town Hall meeting (Henry Cotton).

2 February	Curzon's Partition Despatch to Secretary of State.
11 February	Curzon's Convocation address.
10 March	Town Hall protest against convocation address.
8 May	Dwijendralal Roy's play *Rana Pratapsingha*.
9 June	Secretary of State's consent to Partition.
6 July	"Banger sarbanash"—*Sanjibani*. E. Bengal Petition to Secretary of State signed by 70,000.
13 July	*Sanjibani* call for boycott.
14-23 July	Boycott resolutions adopted at Kishoregunj, Bagerhat, Pabna.
19 July	Formal announcement of partition decision.
7 August	Town Hall meeting under Manindra Nandi adopts boycott resolution.
3, 5, 15 August	Bepin Pal's meetings urging extension of boycott to education and titles. *Sandhya* denounces "Slavishness in Protest" (9 and 14 August).
23 August	*Pratijna* call for "passive resistance".
25 August	Rabindranath's *Abastha o byabastha* (Situation and Remedy) address.
1 September	Partition Proclamation.
2 September	Howrah Burn clerks' strike.
7 September	Students' Union founded under Surendranath.
22 September	Town Hall meeting (Lalmohan Ghosh).
23 September	Hindu-Muslim rally at Rajabazar in north Calcutta.
27 September	Government of India and Bengal Secretariat Press strike.
28 September	Mahalaya swadeshi pledge at Kalighat temple.
September	*The Case Against the Break-up of Bengal*, *All About Partition*, *Raja ke?* and *Sonar bangla* illegal leaflets.
September	Three editions of *Bande Mataram* collection of swadeshi songs.

	3 October	Harrison Road police-picketers clash.
	5-10 October	Calcutta tram conductors' strike.
	16 October	Partition Day—Rakhibandhan-arandhan, Federation Hall, strikes in Calcutta suburbs, closing of shops. ***Bangalakshmir brata-katha.***
	21 October	Renewal of press strike, foundation of Printers' Union under A. K. Ghosh.
	21 October	Pedlar letter to college principals.
	22 October	Publication of Carlyle Circular threatening withdrawal of grants, scholarships, and recognition.
	24 October-17 November	Development of movement to boycott official education—numerous student rallies at College Square and Field and Academy Club.
	November	Repressive measures at Rangpur, Madaripur and Barisal; Lyons' Educational and Bande Mataram Circulars (8 November).
	4 November	Foundation of Anti-Circular Society.
	8 November	First National School at Rangpur.
	9 November	Subodh Mullick's gift of one lakh rupees.
	16 November	National Education Conference at Bengal Landholders' Association —examination boycott called off.
1905	November	Viceroyalty of Minto.
1910	November	
1905	10 December	Second Conference of Landholders' Association sets up Ways and Means Committee.
	24 December	Formation of extremist 'Swadeshi Mandali'.
	25 December	Amritalal Bose's play *Sabash bangali.*
	December	Benaras Congress, First Industrial Conference.
1906	31 January	Town Hall meeting and petition to Morley.
	14 February	Grand Theatre meeting to honour swadeshi sufferers.
	16 February	Muslim reception to swadeshi sufferers at Albert Hall.

3 March	17 meetings in Calcutta as reply to Morley's settled fact speech.
March	Fort Gloster Jute Mill (Bauria) strike, aided by A. C. Banerji and Prabhatkusum Roy-chaudhuri.
11 March	Foundation of National Council of Education.
23, 28 March	Letters criticising composition of National Council of Education published in *Bengalee*.
April	Foundation of *Yugantar* weekly.
14-15 April	Barisal Provincial Conference—lathi-charge on volunteers, arrest of Surendranath, conference dispersed by police. Wave of protest meetings; resignations from honorary posts.
April-May	Iswargunj riots.
April-May	Bepin Pal, Subodh Mullick and Aurobindo's tour of Dacca, Mymensingh and Comilla.
4-6 June	Shivaji 'utsava' with Bhawani-image, attend-by Tilak, Khaparde and Munje.
6 June	Printers' Union reception to Maharashtrian leaders.
10 June	Moderate-extremist clash at meeting to set up Congress Reception Committee.
25 July	Opening of Bengal Technical Institute.
July-September	EIR clerks' strike.
27 July	Foundation of Railwaymen's Union at *Sandhya* office meeting.
1 August	Opening of Banga Lakshmi Cotton Mills.
3 August	Resignation of Fuller.
4 August	Asansol branch of Railwaymen's Union set up by Apurbakumar Ghosh and Premtosh Bose.
7 August	Boycott day procession and meeting with participation of Printers' Union and national flag prepared by Anti-Circular Society.
11 August	First anniversary meeting of Barisal Swadesh Bandhab Samiti.
15 August	Opening of Bengal National College and School.

	19 August	**Foundation of Indian Mill-Hands' Union at Budge Budge under Aswinicoomar Banerji and Prabhatkusum Roychaudhuri.**
	27 August	**Firing on Jamalpur railway workshop strikers.**
	August	**Foundation of *Bande Mataram* daily.**
	5 September	**Asansol railway clerks' strike.**
	4-6 September	**Strike at Kharagpur railway workshop.**
	18 September	**Bepin Pal's article "That Sinful Desire" defining aims and methods of extremism.**
	September	**Foundation of Dacca Anushilan Samiti.**
	1 October	**Simla deputation.**
	16 October	**Meetings against and in support of partition.**
	June-October	**Famine relief work by Barisal Swadesh Bandhab Samiti.**
1906	August	**Hemchandra Kanungo in Europe—contacts with Russian socialists in Paris.**
1908	January	
1906	3 November	**Foundation of proswadeshi Bengal Mahomedan Association.**
	21 November	***Sandhya* exposition of passive resistance creed.**
	December	**Calcutta Congress and Industrial Conference. Foundation of Muslim League.**
1907	January-March	**Pal's tour of Rangpur, Dinajpur, Comilla, Barisal.**
	February	**Comilla district conference.**
	3 March	***Yugantar* criticism of passive resistance.**
	4-6 March	**Comilla riots.**
	March-April	**Berhampur Provincial Conference.**
	April-May	**Pal's tour of Andhra and Madras.**
	9-23 April	**Aurobindo's articles in *Bande Mataram*--"Doctrine of Passive Resistance".**
	April	**District conferences in Rajshahi, Rangpur, Mymensingh.**
	April-May	**Mymensingh riots—Jamalpur, Dewangunj, Bakshigunj, Phulpur.**
	2-9 May	**Disturbances in Punjab; deportation of Lajpat Rai and Ajit Singh.**

11 May	Regulation of Meetings Ordinance passed and applied to Punjab and parts of East Bengal.
14 May	Proposed sedition cases against Pal and six swadeshi Muslim orators.
25-26 May	Khulna district conference.
3 June	Warning to newspapers.
12 June	Arrest of Liakat Husain and Gafur in Barisal.
June	Jessore and Pabna district conferences.
22 June	*Bande Mataram* editorial attacking "Mr A. Chaudhuri's policy".
July	24-Parganas district conference; banning of Faridpur district conference.
3 July	Proposed deportation of Aswinikumar Dutta.
24 July	Conviction of Bhupendranath Dutta in *Yugantar* sedition case.
8 August	Loyalist manifesto of British Indian Association.
August	Rabindranath's *Byadhi o pratikar*.
26 August	*Yugantar's* polemic with *Sandhya*.
September	Hooghly district conference.
10 September	Contempt of court sentence on Pal in *Bande Mataram* sedition case.
14 September	*Nabasakti* call for political strikes on Russian model.
22 September	Sherpur police-Muslim clash.
23 September	Acquittal of Aurobindo in *Bande Mataram* case.
25 September – 1 October	Keir Hardie's tour of E. Bengal.
2-4 October	Calcutta clashes.
27 October	Death of Brahmabandhab Upadhyay.
1 November	Seditious Meetings Act.
18-30 November	Strike of Eurasian drivers and guards of EIR.
6 December	Attempt to blow up Fraser's train near Narayangarh; Chingripota dacoity.

	7-8 December	Moderate-extremist clash at Midnapur district conference.
	23 December	Attack on Dacca district magistrate.
	26-27 December	Surat Congress and split.
	December 1907 – February 1908	Strike of Muslim drivers and firemen on Eastern Bengal State Railway.
1908	27 January	3 years' rigorous imprisonment for Liakat Husain.
	12 February	Rabindranath's Presidential Address at Pabna Provincial Conference.
	February	Birbhum district conference.
	February-March	Strikes and clashes at Tuticorin and Tinnevelli.
	February	Comilla and Mymensingh district conferences.
	March	Faridpur district conference.
	March-April	Kidderpore Royal Indian Marine Dockyard strike.
	5 April	Fund-raising procession of dock strikers led by A. C. Banerji.
	11 April	Attack on Mayor Tardivel of Chandernagore.
	April	Calcutta telegraph signallers' strike.
	30 April	Assassination of Kennedies at Muzaffarpur.
	2 May	Round-up of Aurobindo-Barin group.
	2 June	Barrah dacoity—first major action of Dacca Anushilan.
	8 June	Explosive Substances and Indian Newspapers Acts.
	13 June	Kshudiram Bose sentenced to death.
	June	Rabindranath's *Path o patheya.*
	24-29 July	6-day political strike of Bombay workers against Tilak sentence.
	31 August	Assassination of Narendranath Gossain in side Alipur jail.
	7 November	Attack on Fraser.
	9 November	Assassination of subinspector Nandalal Banerji.

	11 December	Indian Criminal Law Amendment Act.
	11 December	Deportations of Krishnakumar Mitra, Sachindraprasad Basu, Manoranjan Guha, Aswinikumar Dutta, Satischandra Chatterji, Shyamsundar Chakrabarti, Subodhchandra Mullick, Bhupeshchandra Nag, Pulinbehari Das.
	27 December	D. L. Roy's *Mewar-patan.*
1909	5 January	Banning of Barisal Swadesh Bandhab Samiti, Dacca Anushilan, Faridpur Brati Samiti, Mymensingh Suhrid Samiti and Sadhana Samaj.
1907-1909		Rabindranath's *Gora.*

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Now with Jadavpur University. I am grateful to Sri P. C. V. Mallik

for granting me permission to consult this diary, excerpts from which the university intends to publish in the near future.

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Bengali

Files of most Bengali newspapers are no longer available today, but I was able to see the *Sanjibani* for 1311 (1904) (through the courtesy of Sri Sukumar Mitra and Sri Nagen Guha Roy) and one or two stray copies of the *Sandhya*, the *Yugantar*, and the *Howrah Hitaishi*. Upadhyay's weekly *Swaraj* and Aurobindo's *Dharma* have also been consulted.

Monthlies

English

The Dawn, Indian World, Industrial India, Modern Review.

Bengali

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20. Chandranath Basu, *The Partition Agitation Explained*, 7 pp, S. K. Lahiri, 54 College Street, August 1906.

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1909	5 January	Banning of Barisal Swadesh Bandhab Samiti, Dacca Anushilan, Faridpur Brati Samiti, Mymensingh Suhrid Samiti and Sadhana Samaj.
1907-1909		Rabindranath's *Gora.*

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2. **Private Papers of Surjyakumar Ghoshal (obtained through the courtesy of Dr Maitrayee Bose, M.P.)**

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3. **Private Papers of Krishnakumar Mitra and Sukumar Mitra (through the courtesy of Sri Sukumar Mitra, Krishnakumar's son)**

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6. **Unpublished Diary of Hemendraprasad Ghosh**

Now with Jadavpur University. I am grateful to Sri P. C. V. Mallik

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